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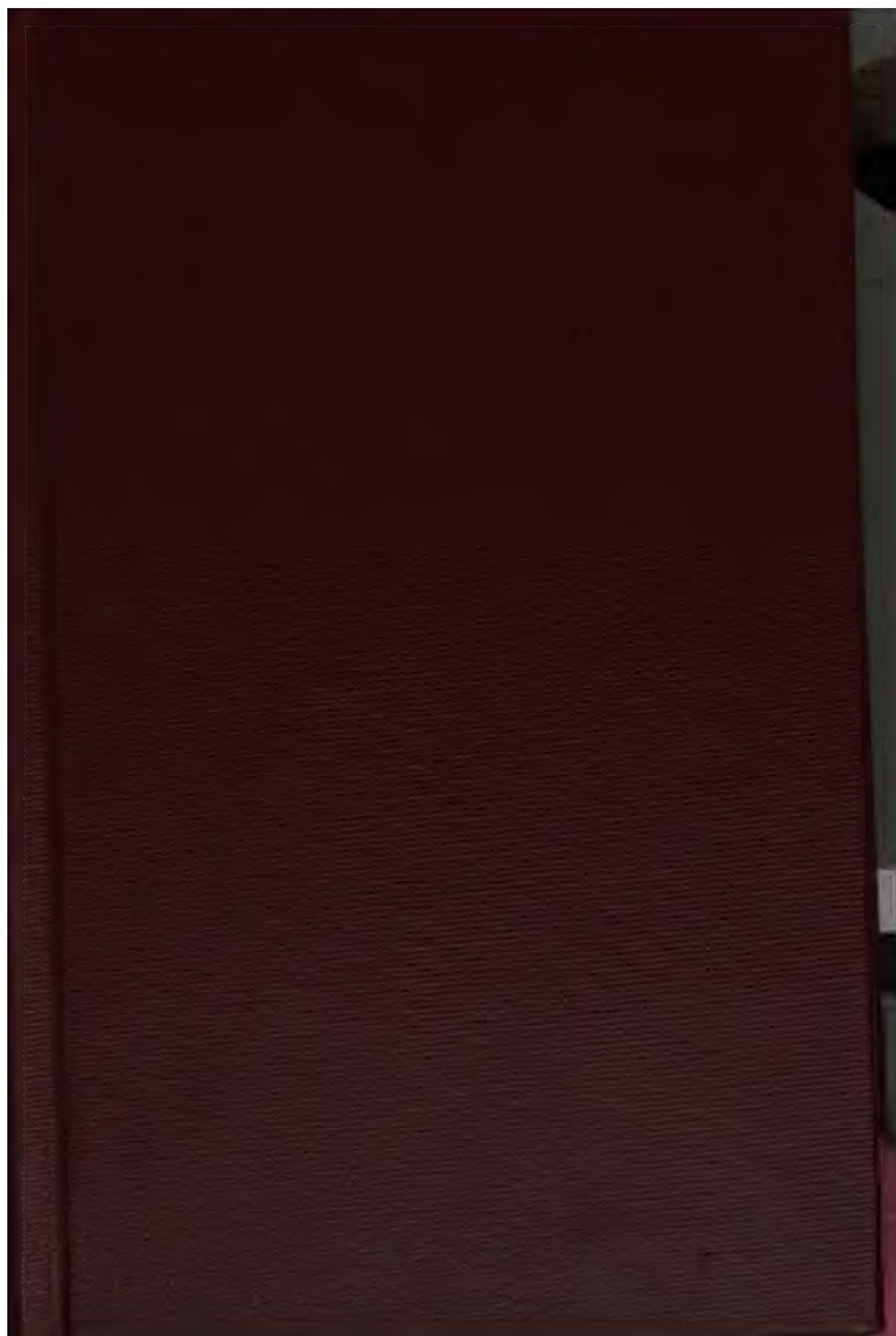
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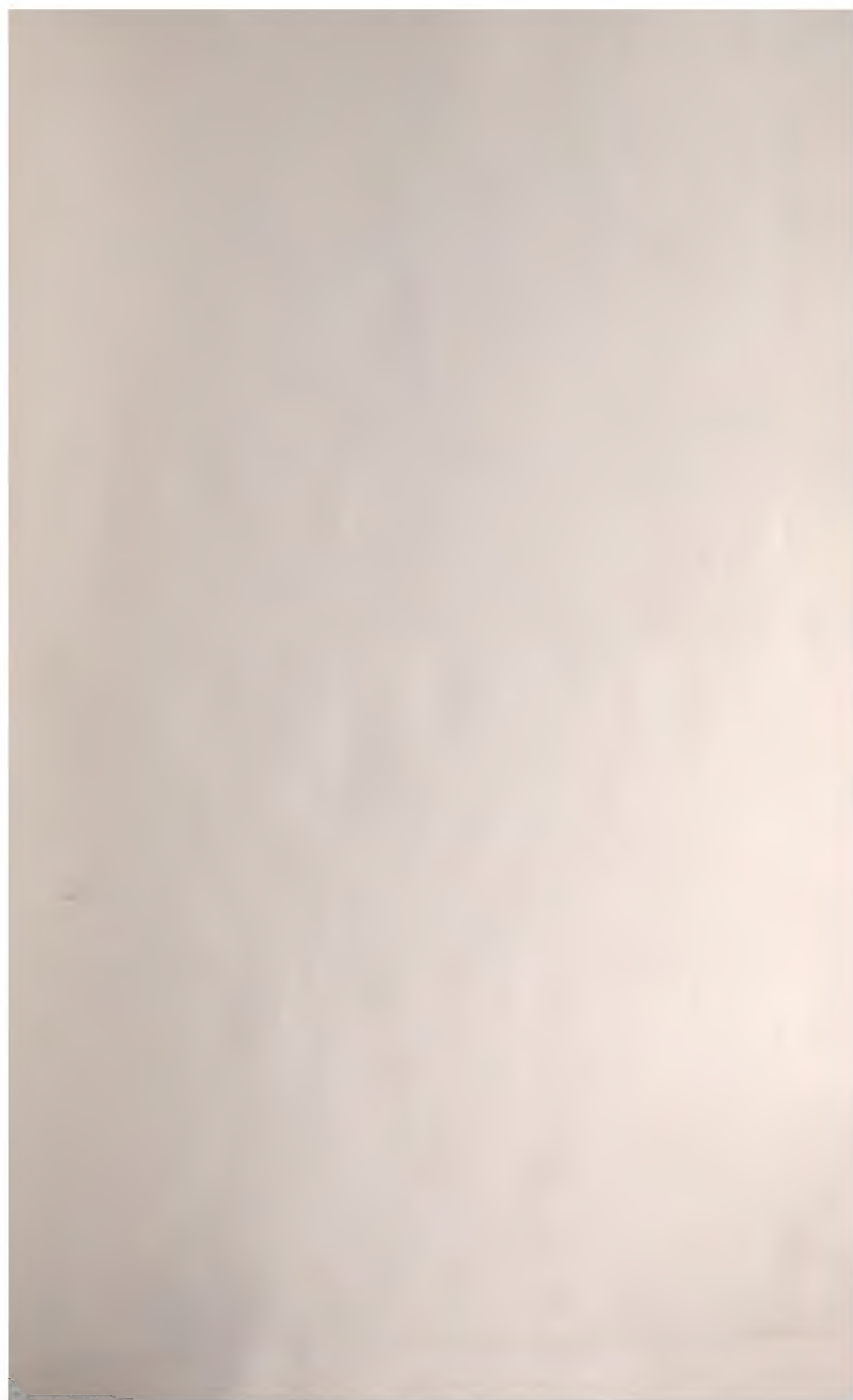


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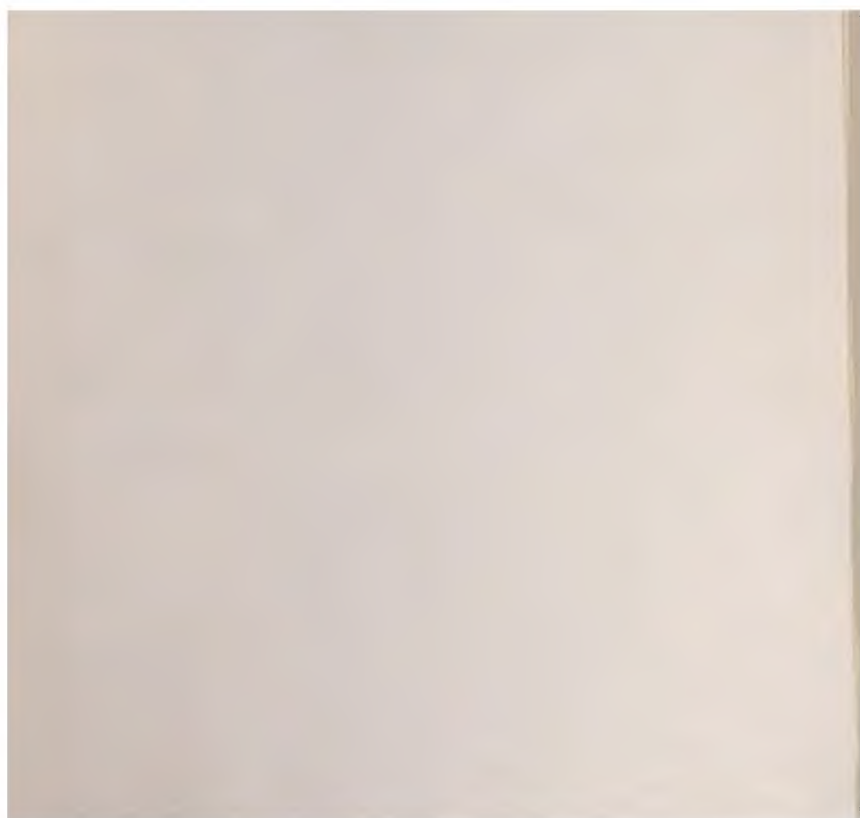


FROM THE FUND OF  
CHARLES MINOT  
CLASS OF 1828

















THE AUTHORSHIP  
OF THE  
*De Imitatione Christi*

WITH MANY INTERESTING PARTICULARS  
ABOUT THE BOOK

BY  
SAMUEL KETTLEWELL, M.A.  
LATE VICAR OF ST. MARK'S, LEEDS

*Containing Photographic Engravings of the "De Imitatione" written by  
Thomas à Kempis, 1441, and of two other MSS.*

C RIVINGTONS  
WATERLOO PLACE, LONDON  
Oxford and Cambridge

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## PREFACE.

DURING a season of leisure, when free from parochial duties, and desirous of being usefully employed, I had formed the design of writing the Life of Thomas à Kempis, and had spent some time in collecting and arranging materials for it. Much of the celebrity of this pious individual arises from his being recognised as the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' and it was upon this assumption that I was preparing to write his life. I was well aware, however, that the fact had been warmly disputed, and that other persons had been acknowledged instead, and therefore I purposed to write an introduction to the Life, showing briefly the grounds upon which I had formed my decision that the priceless work of the 'De Imitatione' had been written by him. For if I had not in the first place entered upon this question, it might have been said by some, and especially by those who had espoused the cause of other writers, You take it for granted that Thomas à Kempis is the author of the

book,—are you aware that great doubts exist about it, and that there are serious objections to his being accounted as such?—first prove that he is the author, in some adequate degree, and that the other claimants have not a right to it, and then will it be time enough to assume that Thomas à Kempis has a true claim. There would be force in such a remark, and the feeling prevailed that it would be more satisfactory to meet such a reasonable demand.

Knowing that objections did exist, I had taken great pains to satisfy myself on this point, from Eusebius Amort's *Scutum Kempense*, which gives a *résumé* of the controversy, and other works, and I felt that there were sufficient grounds to claim the authorship for Thomas à Kempis, and that it would only be his proper due openly to acknowledge him as such. But then came the consideration, Is it likely, in an age like this, when everything is questioned—when some men of learning and research have come to an opposite opinion—that the public will take your word for it? They may imagine that you have taken a side, as others have done, the opposite to yours, and that you are carried away merely by the popular view, without having any solid ground to rest your judgment upon. If, however, you would convince them, and have them with you in the belief that Thomas à Kempis composed the 'De Imitatione Christi,' give them the opportunity of knowing what you have learnt upon the matter

and how you have arrived at this conclusion. Yielding to this just requirement, I proceeded to write an introduction fully embracing the question. There were, however, two reasons which led eventually to an alteration in the plan. *First*, I found that there were so many points to consider that nearly half the volume would be taken up with them, which would hardly be fair to the readers of the Life of Thomas à Kempis, or allow space for doing justice to it; and *secondly*, whilst engaged on the introduction, two or three notices relative to the authorship of the book appeared,—one or two making it seem very questionable whether Thomas was the real author, and giving the preference to one John Gerson, Chancellor of Paris; and one or two others even positively denying that Thomas could have composed the book, and producing fresh evidence, which seemed very convincing at the first sight, to show that the 'De Imitatione' had been written about two hundred years before by John Gersen of Vercelli. It was necessary, then, to give more precise information than it was at first designed, and to go more fully into the recent charges against the rights of Thomas. This led to a change in the project; for it was deemed wiser to bring out some separate account of the controversy, where a thorough defence in behalf of the claims of Thomas à Kempis might be made, without at all burdening the book on his Life with such an introduction as contemplated.



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In the various works which have been consulted, much information respecting the 'De Imitatione' was brought to light, and many particulars of interest. Some critical remarks also seemed to be needed. These have been incorporated into the work, so as to make it as complete a book upon the 'De Imitatione Christi' as could well be.

It is impossible but that some errors and mistakes may have crept into the work, but the main particulars of the evidence may be relied upon, and opportunity has been afforded of testing it all along. I have added three Appendices—one of the Manuscripts, and another of the older Latin editions to be found in this country, and a third of the older English editions of the 'De Imitatione,'—to show how much the people of England in past generations possessed, and highly esteemed the work. There are doubtless several more manuscripts scattered up and down the country than those named, and copies of the very old editions; the list therefore can only be regarded as somewhat incomplete, but I shall be pleased to receive further information about any others that exist, and will insert them in a future edition of the work, should it be called for.

Among the many works to which I am indebted, I would especially mention the several books of Eusebius Hieronymus, which are a host in themselves; an account drawn up by an anonymous writer of the various

claimants for the authorship, published in 1710, found in a collection of Tracts in the British Museum; the volumes of M. de Grégory; that of the Abbé de Ghesquière; of G. de Boissy; and the late Bishop Malou's work, of which I have largely availed myself, and to which I am chiefly indebted for information respecting the recent controversies about the authorship. I have often quoted these works, and in many places given a translation from them when their words fell in with the thread of my argument, and only occasionally giving the words in the original when the subject seemed to require it, or a reference to the place where the information is obtained. I cannot omit mentioning the kind attention I have received from those connected with the British Museum and other libraries; and especially the authorities of the Bourgogne Library at Brussels, for the permission to take a few negative photographs of some of the most valuable manuscripts relative to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione' in favour of Thomas à Kempis.

S. K.

LONDON, *March* 1877.

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## PART I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### *The Controversy upon the Authorship.*

**I**S Thomas à Kempis the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi'? Many persons will find it difficult to give a definite answer to this question; and no wonder, when we take into consideration the lengthened and bitter controversy which has prevailed, and the several conflicting opinions which have been advanced respecting the authorship. At present there is but a confused idea about the matter; the multiplicity of words and the heat of partisanship have but served to obscure the question, and to render it less clear than ever. First one individual and then another has been named as possessing some claim to the title; and their cause has been defended with a pertinacity and warmth which would surprise us, did we not call to mind how anxious some of the religious orders are to bring honour to their brotherhood; and, indeed, so much so, that when reasonable and honest thinking men would conclude, from the evidence submitted to them, that they have little ground for establishing any



claim, they still hold to their opinion, and will not admit, or see any force in, the proofs which are dead against them.

On the Continent, the question has engaged the public attention much more than in this country. More than two hundred years ago, Rosweyde and Thomas Carre most effectually disposed of the pretensions advanced in favour of Gersen by P. Rosignoli and Constantine Cajétan. After a time the controversy was more warmly renewed than ever in the days of Richelieu, when the matter was debated before the Lords of Request in the Court of Parliament in Paris on several occasions, and afterwards, also several trials in various years, were carried on before special assemblies of the most learned men of France, to which we shall hereafter allude. Then Eusebius Amort, more than a hundred years ago, wrote several learned treatises relative to this matter, collecting and setting forth the evidence in favour of Thomas à Kempis in a most able manner. Later still, we have M. Gence in the *Biographie Universelle* and other writings strenuously espousing the cause of Gerson, the Parisian Chancellor; and then the learned M. Grégory endeavouring to overthrow the evidence and arguments in favour of both Gerson and Thomas à Kempis, and labouring hard, and at first sight with some apparent success, to make out a good case once more for Gersen of Vercelli. He is, however, steadily and effectively met by Mgr. Malon in his *Recherches*, who carefully examines the statements made in defence both of Gersen and Gerson, and shows how little weight

dependence is to placed upon them, and faithfully recounts the evidence and arguments, chiefly advanced aforetime by Eusebius Amort, in behalf of Thomas à Kempis. And, lastly, within a few years of the present time, we have MM. Thomassy and Vert advocating the claims of Gerson of Paris. There are besides numerous other writers, which it would be in vain to recount, on one side or the other. But the general view which the public are thus led to take of these discussions and contentions is, that the question is so involved in obscurity that they feel as if in a mist where they can distinguish nothing clearly, and that it is almost impossible to come to any satisfactory conclusion. And not a few have taken up their views in favour of one or other of those who have been put forward as the author from reading the works or writings of their several advocates, and without further examination—without hearing what their opponents have said as to the evidence advanced—have formed their judgment upon a very incomplete acquaintance with the subject. Thus, those who have studied M. Gence's works will be most likely to decide in favour of Gerson; those, on the other hand, who have taken up M. Grégory's books, and gone no further, will be persuaded that Gerson of Vercelli is the author of the 'De Imitatione.' And those who peruse Mgr. Malon's *Recherches* will feel convinced that there is little to substantiate the claim of either one or the other, and that Thomas à Kempis has undoubtedly composed it.

We have good reason for saying this when we consider how the question has been taken up in England.

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And one thing that an observant mind cannot fail to perceive is this, that whilst there has been a readiness and proneness to seize upon the objections which can be alleged against the claims of Thomas à Kempis, and a preference given to other persons who are supposed to be the authors of the 'De Imitatione' upon very slight and insufficient grounds, the most substantial proofs and the most convincing arguments in favour of Thomas à Kempis seem almost to be lost sight of, or unknown in this country. There appears to be a strange ignorance or obliviousness respecting the grounds upon which he is so generally accredited to be the author. An impression prevails that there is nothing but popular opinion—upon which little dependence, it is imagined, can be placed—for the general belief that he has written the book, without considering that there may be some very substantial reasons upon which this popular belief is founded. And because some popular traditions have been held, which are without any sound foundation, not a few have persuaded themselves that thus it must be in the belief that Thomas à Kempis is the author of the 'De Imitatione,' and have either set themselves in opposition to his claim by preferring, and even pronouncing decisively in favour of one or other of the supposed authors, or have given him but such scant acknowledgment as to undermine his credit.

Thus, from what was said some years ago, in an article in the *Christian Remembrancer* (April 18: many English Churchmen have settled it in their minds that Thomas à Kempis did not compose the '

Imitatione,' but only copied it. And yet the writer of this article only makes a short allusion to the question, and does not profess to enter upon an examination of it. But in passing he intimates that the learned do not now acknowledge à Kempis as the author, and gives briefly six or seven arguments which he finds alleged against his title to the book. These may seem very formidable before they are looked into; but as they can be easily met, we purpose to examine and answer them further on when we come to discuss the claims of Thomas à Kempis.

The Rev. T. F. Dibdin, D.D., F.R.S., etc. etc., in his preface to the 'De Imitatione' edited by him in 1828, says :—

"It will be seen that I have not hesitated to discard Thomas à Kempis entirely from all pretension to the genuine authorship of this book; and I have, although with some hesitation, assigned it to John Gersen of Vercelli, a Benedictine monk of the middle of the thirteenth century. My reasons will, it is presumed, be carefully weighed before they are attempted to be refuted."—p. xxxvi.

This is a very positive declaration against the claims of Thomas à Kempis, and equally so are the words further on, where he says :—

"The weight of evidence is conclusive against Thomas à Kempis being the author of the work."—p. lxxxiii.

Even Hallam, in his celebrated work on *The Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, when mentioning the 'De Imitatione,' does not seem to have taken much trouble to inquire into the evidence in favour of Thomas à Kempis, if he even knew of the existence of any that

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was most material, but to have contented himself, as many others have done, with considering the various opinions held against the general belief that Thomas was the author. Hence the reader gets little help in the matter, and the question is left almost as indefinite as ever. This learned writer remarks, in a note :—

"I am not prepared to state the external evidence upon this keenly debated question with sufficient precision. In a few words it may, I believe, be said that in favour of Thomas à Kempis has been alleged the testimony of many early editions bearing his name, including one about 1471, which appears to be the first, as well as a general tradition from his own time, extending over most of Europe, which has led a great majority, including the Sorbonne itself, to determine the cause in his favour. It is also said that a manuscript of the treatise '*De Imitatione*' bears these words at the conclusion, *Finitus et completus per manum Thomæ de Kempis, 1441*: and that in the manuscript are so many erasures and alterations as to give it the appearance of his original autograph. Against Thomas à Kempis it is urged that he was a professed calligrapher or copyist for the College of Deventer; that the *Chronicles of St. Agnes*, a contemporary work, says of him, *Scriptis Bibliothecæ nostræ totaliter, et multos alios libros pro domo et pro pretorio*; that the entry above mentioned is more like that of a transcriber than an author; that the same Chronicle makes no mention of his having written the treatise '*De Imitatione*,' nor does it appear in an early list of works ascribed to him."—Hallam's *Introd. Lit. Europe*, vol. i. p. 137.

The present Bishop of Carlisle, in his introduction to a new translation of the '*De Imitatione*,' is inclined to accept Thomas à Kempis as the author, but he does so with great hesitation.

"I have spoken," he says, "of Thomas à Kempis as the author, because in this country I believe that the more general opinion is in his favour; but if any reader believes that the



honour of the work is due rather to Gerson or to Gersen, I shall have no quarrel with him. The controversy concerning the authorship is one of the many puzzles which the history of literature records."—p. xvi.

This is, to say the least, a very unsatisfactory way to leave the question.

The authoress of a metrical translation of the 'De Imitatione,' published by Burn, Oates, and Co., 1869, says:—

"As it appears that the original authorship of 'The Following of Christ' is involved in some obscurity, the authoress of this 'metrical translation' ventures to observe that it seems John Gersen wrote 'The Following of Christ' in the original Latin, in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Soon after this work was written, it was literally copied by Thomas à Kempis."

There are a few more recent utterances upon the question under consideration, to which we shall have to allude when we come to discuss the evidence in favour of those who are severally believed to be the authors of the 'De Imitatione.' And in some shorter allusions to the authorship, one writer says, it is "generally, but wrongly, attributed to à Kempis;" another, that "it is very doubtful whether he be the author;" and a third, "It cannot be written by him."

Thus it is evident that much uncertainty and doubt exist in this country on the question, and that as far as can be gathered, the decision of the literary world in England is, upon the whole, opposed to acknowledging Thomas à Kempis as the author; but with all this, there is an apparent unconsciousness of the solid proofs in his favour. All this shows that there is need of more light and information about the

matter; all this shows how desirable it is that the question should be further looked into and thoroughly examined; that the several claims in behalf of other individuals, and especially as regards two of them, who are opposed to the interests of Thomas, should be openly and fairly canvassed, that we may see what claim they have to our credit, and whether, when searched into and accurately weighed, they are such as reasonable men may trust to. All this shows how necessary it is to meet and rebut the statements and arguments made directly adverse to the title of Thomas à Kempis, and to remove anything that appears to stand in the way of his being the author. As for instance, whether there was a copy of the '*De Imitatione*' in existence before Thomas à Kempis was born or no, which would really prove fatal to his title at once, if it indeed were so. But besides this, what has been said shows how important it is, in the endeavour to settle this much disputed matter, that the several kinds of evidence which are forthcoming in favour of the claim of Thomas à Kempis should be fully made known, should, at least, receive our attentive consideration, should, indeed, also be as honestly and as searchingly looked into and sifted as an opposing advocate would do, so that we may see how far they are worthy of our belief, and in what degree they fairly and surely support the claim of Thomas à Kempis.

This method of dealing with the question will, we trust, tend to disperse the cloud of uncertainty and perplexity which now so unhappily encompasses the subject. It will enable those who care to look more

deeply into it than hitherto to balance in their minds the whole of the controversy, both the evidence in favour of others, and its credibility, and what can be affirmed against or in favour of Thomas, and then finally to determine for themselves, so far as it is possible to do, whether his claim to be the author can be established.

No one should reply to the question we have asked, then, off-hand, without having in some measure examined the matter for himself. And it is not until the question has been considered in all its bearings, on one side and the other, that any one should feel himself fully qualified to give a definite and distinctive answer. It is, therefore, to enable the reader to form some conclusion for himself on this much disputed subject, to help him to answer the question in some measure satisfactorily to his own mind, that this interesting inquiry has been entered upon, and for which a solution has been asked, and will be asked over and over again, "Is Thomas à Kempis the author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*'?"



## CHAPTER II.

### *The Excellency of the De Imitatione.*

THERE can be no doubt of the interest, value, and importance of the inquiry, for it is one of the most celebrated of all books throughout Christendom, next to the Bible. Many years ago it was said that the book had gone through 1800 editions, and had probably been more read than any other work after the Scriptures;<sup>1</sup> and to mention the various languages into which it has been translated would be but to enumerate the several languages which are most commonly used at the present day. It is to be found even in countries where it might seem little likely to

<sup>1</sup> Hallam, *Introd. Lit. Europe*, i. 138. Becker, in his *Essai Bibliographique sur le livre de Imit.*, published at Liège in 1864, says, "The number of editions and different translations which have come to my knowledge is about 2900, and certainly this number is much below the reality." "Pierre Pige, librarian of Paris, said to P. Desbillons in 1779, that the editions of the *Imitatio* which were known to him were as many as 1800." Becker counted 775 French editions that had appeared by the year 1812. The Catalogue of Cologne in 1843 had a collection of manuscripts, etc., chiefly left to it by Canon Von Bullinger, in which there were 170 Latin editions, 112 German, and 6 French. Becker, however, says that he has asked one of his friends touching these manuscripts, but his reply is that the public library does not possess them. It is difficult indeed to know what books and manuscripts are contained in this city. The writer, when searching during the present year in the libraries of Cologne for the Bible written in Latin by the hand of Thomas A Kempis, in four volumes, found the manuscripts and old books of one of the public libraries piled up in the middle of a room. Moreover, many of the valuable manuscripts are now lost sight of, for upon inquiring of the Canon's residence at the cathedral, he said that they had been dispersed abroad.

be met with, for it has been printed in Turkish, Chinese, and Arabic. A late French writer, giving an account of Zwolle, makes mention of this interesting fact respecting the 'De Imitatione,' when speaking of Thomas à Kempis as its author, and the many translations of it:—

"It is said that, early in the seventeenth century, a few religious Spaniards, visiting the king of Maroc for the purpose of ransoming some Christian slaves, were astonished to find the monarch reading a copy of the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ,' translated into Turkish. On expressing their surprise, the king replied, 'Of all the books I possess, this one seems to me the best in every way.'"<sup>1</sup>

It has exercised a wide-spread influence, which it would be difficult to estimate; it has served to bring into our religion a reality and earnestness which is at once thorough and elevating; it has taught men that no outward gifts or talents, no outward service or enthusiasm, no external performance or worship, will avail without having a life hidden with God; that the essence of all true religion, the spring of all religious action and devotion, must have its seat and origin in the heart. As a manual of devotion it is unrivalled in its grand simplicity, in its unswerving allegiance to the Word of God, which it points out to us as the source of truth, as the rule for our guidance, as showing to us the true way of life and salvation. And so deep an experience of the human heart does it manifest, so accurate a knowledge of the ways of God and His dealings with souls in the various changes and moods of a religious life, so direct and applicable its counsels

<sup>1</sup> Havard, *The Dead Cities of the Zuyder-Zee*, p. 332.

to the soul in its different phases, so intense its devotion, so firm its resolution in its subjugation of self to the will of God in everything, that it has been regarded well-nigh as an inspired volume,—a book wherein a man of God, who has lived with God, and made it the business of his life to fashion his ways and his will according to God's holy will, and who has sought the presence of God continually, so as but to think and act and speak as God would have him,—has by his words made known to us the wisdom that has been revealed to him for advancing the spiritual life, the holy rules and admonitions he employed in training himself and teaching others also to acquire the heavenly art of doing God's will on earth, as it is perfectly and gladly done by the angels above; and who has even led us into the sacred retirement of his cell, to witness, or at least to hear and become acquainted with, the sweet and solemn communion and intercourse which transpired in his holiest moments between God and his own soul. And so sacred and so solemn were these hallowed seasons, and the fellowship which he held with God—so exalted the requirements and the walk of his saint-like life which he unfolds,—that his words seem to shine forth, as did the face of Moses after holding communion with God on the mount, with such a brightness of spiritual devotedness, such an intense penetrating clearness of thought, and such a singular felicity of holy fervour, that we cannot look upon what he writes without feeling that we need to put a veil over our imperfections and shortcomings, that we indeed need a Saviour, and in fellowship with Whom

so we shall have a yearning desire to attain to a higher and more perfect life with God.

The words of the 'De Imitatione' were probably at first only designed for the more advanced in the religious community to which the author belonged; and he little dreamt that his book, which he composed in the solitude of his beloved cell, and in the stillness of God's pervading presence, would ever become so famous in the Christian world as it is. He had lowly views of himself, and, assuming the author to be Thomas à Kempis, though he ever did his best in all that he undertook, even in the work of copying—as his Bible and missals show,—he had a humble opinion of his labours, and felt that without the blessing of God accompanying them, they would fall to the ground and be little esteemed, and productive of but little good. His own words express the sentiments of his heart:—

"If thou thinkest that thou understandest and knowest much, yet know that there be many more things which thou knowest not. Affect not to be overwise, but rather acknowledge thine own ignorance. Why wilt thou prefer thyself before others, seeing there be many more learned and more skilful in the Scriptures than thou?"

"If thou know or learn anything profitably, desire to be unknown and to be little esteemed. The highest and most profitable lesson is the true knowledge and the low esteem of ourselves. It is great wisdom and perfection to think nothing of ourselves, and to think always well and highly of others." *Ibid.* l. 2.

But however much the author shunned the notice of men, and desired to remain unknown, however the outer world at a distance were ignorant of the fact of his being the author, and made bold guesses as to who

wrote the 'De Imitatione,' still the matter could not be wholly unknown to those with whom he lived, and with whom he daily held sweet intercourse; and while they seem to have respected his motives for not publicly proclaiming the fact more widely during his life, there was no reason, when he was beyond the reach of mortal praise or censure, and when the profound reverence and fervour of his soul could not be injured or disturbed by it, why those who had known and honoured him should not afterwards declare who was the man to whom the Church universal was so much indebted for such a rich and sacred legacy.

Those who know the 'De Imitatione Christi,' and have learnt to value it, and those who have found a blessing from its precious words, will often speak of it with enthusiasm and delight, and with some warmth of feeling and special affection for it to others; many a Christian philosopher, and even many a keen critic and man of letters and research, has sung its praises, and pointed it out as a book of singular excellence, as standing out above ten thousand others, as truly unique,—not for its learning or eloquence, or any attractive merits which are usually acceptable in the world, but for its remarkable simplicity, its force of thought, its direct penetration to the heart, its power and influence upon the life and conscience of men. Here are a few passages from various authors about the merits of the 'De Imitatione,' which are worth treasuring up:—

"In one remarkable book," says Milman in his *History of Latin Christianity*, "was gathered and concentrated all that



was elevating, passionate, profoundly pious, in all the older mystics. Gerson, Rysbrock, Tauler, all who addressed the heart in later times, were summed up, and brought into one circle of light and heat, in the single small volume, the *'Imitation of Christ.'* That this book supplies some imperious want in the Christianity of mankind, that it supplied it with a fulness and felicity which left nothing, at this period of Christianity, to be desired, its boundless popularity is the one unanswerable testimony. No book has been so often reprinted, no book has been so often translated, or into so many languages, as the *'Imitation of Christ.'* The mystery of its authorship, as in other cases, might have added to its fame and circulation; but that mystery was not wanted with regard to the *'Imitation.'* Who was the author—Italian, German, French, Fleming? With each of these races it is taken up as a question of national vanity. Was it the work of priest, canon, monk? This, too, in former times, was debated with the eagerness of rival orders. The size of the book, the style, the arrangement, as well as its profound sympathy with all the religious feelings, wants, and passions; its vivid and natural expressions, to monastic Christianity what the Hebrew Psalms are to our common religion and to our common Christianity; its contagious piety,—all conspired to its universal dissemination, its universal use. This one little volume contained in its few pages the whole essence of the St. Victor, of Bonaventura without his Franciscan peculiarities, and of the later mystic school. Yet it might be easily held in the hand, carried about where no other book was borne,—in the narrow cell or chamber, on the journey, into the solitude, among the crowd and throng of men, in the prison. Its manner; its short, quivering sentences, which went at once to the heart, and laid hold of and clung tenaciously to the memory with the compression and completeness of proverbs; its axioms, each of which suggested endless thought, its imagery, scriptural and simple, were alike original, unique. The style is ecclesiastical Latin, but the perfection of ecclesiastical Latin,—brief, pregnant, picturesque; expressing profound thoughts in the fewest words, and those words, if compared with the scholastics, of purer Latin sound and construction. The facility with which it passed into other languages, those

especially of Roman descent, bears witness to its perspicuity, vivacity, and energy. Its arrangement has something of the consecutive progress of an ancient institution; it has its commencement, its middle, its close; discriminating yet leading up the student in constant ascent; it is an epopee of the internal history of the human soul.

"The 'Imitation of Christ' both advanced and arrested the development of Teutonic Christianity; it was prophetic of its approach, as showing that it was demanded of the human soul, and as endeavouring in its own way to supply that imperative necessity; yet by its deficiency, as a manual of universal religion, of eternal Christianity, it showed as clearly that the human mind, the human heart, could not rest in the Imitation. It acknowledged, it endeavoured to fill up the void of *personal* religion. The Imitation is the soul of man working out its own salvation, with hardly any aid but the confessed necessity of divine grace. It may be because it is the work of an ecclesiastic, a priest, or monk; but, with the exception of the exhortation to frequent communion, there is nothing whatever of sacerdotal intervention; all is the act, the obedience, the aspiration, the self-purification, the self-exaltation of the soul. It is the Confessional in which the soul confesses to itself; it is the Direction by whose sole guidance the soul directs itself. The book absolutely and entirely supersedes and supplies the place of the spiritual teacher, the spiritual guide, the spiritual comforter; it is in itself that teacher, guide, comforter. No manual of Teutonic devotion is more absolutely sufficient. According to its notion of Christian perfection, Christian perfection is attainable by its study and by the performance of its precepts; the soul needs no other mediator, at least no earthly mediator, for its union with the Lord."—Milman's *Lat. Christ.* vol. ix. pp. 161-163.

And yet, having given this quotation, we are in all fairness bound to state, that one of the keenest and most withering of criticisms that we have seen against some apparent defects of the book comes from this same hand. These we hope to notice before we conclude,

and are prepared in some degree to challenge what is said ; for though we do not hold that the book is perfect as a complete compendium of Christian duty, and is not altogether faultless according to our notions, yet take it for what it is, and the design of the author in writing it—and not after an idea of our own, as to what we want,—and there is none like it, in all the world. But we stay not now to discuss the criticisms upon the book, for they are of different kinds, and proceed from different quarters. We would now rather view its fair proportions, its innate merits, as a goodly heritage bequeathed to the saints of God.

And here we cannot forbear quoting some other words of exquisite beauty respecting this book from a living author ; which will show the high regard with which the 'De Imitatione' is to be estimated. He says :—

"When its original influence survives the great secular changes which alter the dynasties, the philosophies, nay even the religions of mankind—it must then be either the expression of the loftiest individual genius, or into it, as into some sacred goblet, must have been crushed the rich clusters of the wisdom of centuries." And, "That a book purely devotional—a book which gains no hold by its eloquence, and derives no influence from illustrations—(like the *Pilgrim's Progress*)—a book which has no deep mysteries to reveal, no splendid theories to propound, no elaborate conclusions to demonstrate, should have won for itself a supremacy so unquestioned, a gratitude so ardent, is but a confirmation of what the Greek thinker said, that much learning teacheth not, but 'the voice of the Sibyl,' i. e. the voice of sacred enlightenment 'uttering things simple and unperfumed and unadorned, reaches through unnumbered years by the aid of God.'" Again, "Whoever was the compiler of the book did but gather into one rich casket the religious



yearnings, the interior consolations, the wisdom of solitary experience, which had been wrung from many ages of Christian life. In this sense the bold saying of St. Francis de Sales is true, that 'the book has no other author than the Holy Spirit of God.' " And once more: "Therefore since it is the clearest expression of an eternal yearning of the soul, its profound self-questioning, its unshrinking introspection, its pathetic familiarity with its Creator—the book cannot die. Good men may be—they often have been—utterly mistaken in their most cherished theology, and in their most impassioned convictions, but good men never live in vain, because their spiritual achievements are more sacred than their doctrines, and their lives more valuable than their beliefs; and systems, too, founded on erroneous prejudices may grow corrupt and injurious,

And God fulfil Himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world ;

but if they be based upon sincerity they cannot fail to leave mankind a legacy of truth and wisdom. Hence, though many of the conceptions in which it was rooted have decayed, this book will continue to be valued so long as there are hearts that suffer, and that in suffering desire to rise heavenward on the two wings of simplicity and purity."—*Vide Imit.* II. 4. Dr. Farrar, Ser., *St. James's Lec.* 1875, pp. 3, 13, 14.

In the preface to an English edition of the '*De Imitatione*,' printed A.D. 1633, the following quaint and laudatory words respecting it occur:—

"So full of sweet sense is this divine flower, that the most spiritual bees may daily draw from thence great plenty of celestial honey. It is a dish of so divine meat, that it never satiates the devout mind, but as the wisdom of God doth promise to all such as sit at that heavenly banquet, so shall they find in this spiritual food,—the more they eat it, the more they shall hunger after it.

"And the reason hereof is, for that it containeth so great depth of spirit, and so great store and variety of heavenly documents, that it seemeth ever new to the reader, and, like another manna, affordeth to every one that delightful taste

which best agreeth with the palate of his soul, and none can sate it but they whose lusts do carry them to Egyptian slavery. A true Israelite may feed upon it forty years together, and ever find such pleasing taste, and increasing strength by use thereof, as will sustain him in the desert of this world, and enable him to go on without fainting till he arrives at his promised inheritance of eternal rest.

"It covereth the soul with the rich garment of grace. It adorneth it with the splendid pearls of evangelical perfection."

The Rev. John Wesley also thus speaks of the 'De Imitatione' in the preface to his edition of the work:—

"Such is the strength, spirit, and weight of every sentence that it is scarce possible, without injury to the sense, to add or diminish anything. . . . A serious mind will never be sated with it, though it were read a thousand times over; for those general principles are the seeds of meditation, and the stores they contain can never be exhausted. And herein it greatly resembles the Holy Scriptures, that under the plainest words, there is divine hidden virtue, continually flowing into the soul of a pious and attentive reader, and by the blessing of God transforming it into His image."

But the sweetest words that we have met with respecting the 'De Imitatione' are those of a French divine. He says:—

"There is in truth something celestial in the simplicity of this wonderful book. One would almost imagine that it was out of those pure spirits, which saw God face to face, that had come expressly to explain His word and to reveal His secrets. One is profoundly moved at the aspect of that soft light which nourishes the soul, and fortifies and animates without troubling it."—Meunais, cited in *Dibdin's Introd.* p. clii.

Another French author says:—

"The 'Imitatio' is the finest book which has proceeded from the pen of any man since the days of the Evangelists."  
—M. de Fontenelle.

And another French author, in a collection of letters, says :—

“The Imitation of Jesus Christ is one of the most excellent treatises which was ever composed. Happy the person who is not content to admire its beauties, earnestly endeavours to reduce its precepts to practice!”—*M. Leibnitz.*

In the multiplicity of religious publications which prevail at the present day, some persons may have overlooked the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ or not valued it as it deserves to be, but such testimonies as these which have just been quoted, from various authors, may serve to awaken a fresh interest in the book, may enable them to discern and appreciate its rare merits, and to perceive that it is a work of no ordinary character.

### CHAPTER III.

#### *The Influence of the 'De Imitatione' on the Life and Character.*

AND who can tell the fruit this book has yielded, the wonders it has wrought through God's blessing in the conversion of souls,—in the giving fixity of purpose and holy resolution to unsettled and wavering minds,—in guiding inquiring and anxious hearts to God and to heaven, along the rough and narrow way of life! Not till the last day shall we learn all that has been effected through its potent spiritual influence, and how serviceable it has been to God's people in every age since it was written,—how it has helped to shape anew the life, and direct the course of many an earthly pilgrim as he wandered through the wilderness of this world,—how it has given counsel and imparted fresh vigour to the much-tried soul to persevere in resisting temptations; and what a companion and solace it has been to many noble and devout Christians in hours of loneliness, trouble, and sorrow; not teaching them to be content with its own words, but urging them, as a wise and loving friend, to go direct and directly to the Blessed Jesus—to hearken to the oracles of Divine

truth—and to draw for themselves water out of the wells of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

Many testimonies of its intrinsic value have been made known,—many instances of the good it has wrought might be told,—but we shall here content ourselves by relating only one example out of a number of others that might be named, as an evidence of the efficacious ministry of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’

The instance we give is that of Monsieur de Renty, a captain in the French army during the seventeenth century. In a deeply instructive narrative his biographer says of him :—

“It pleased God so to order it, that a stationer, to whom Monsieur de Renty often repaired to buy such books as he stood in need of, for satisfying the curiosity and ardent desire of his knowledge in sciences suitable to his condition, did one day present to him the famous book of ‘*The Imitation of Christ*,’ and desired him to read it; but he having as then his mind taken up with other notions, made no account of it for that time. The stationer having brought him another day some books that he had need of, presented the same again to him, and, with some earnestness, besought him to be pleased to read it; thereupon he yielded and read it, and was thereby so enlightened and touched (as before him a great multitude of persons of all sorts had been), that entertaining now no other thoughts or affections, he resolved to mind seriously his salvation, and give himself up to God; so that amongst the great fruits and signal victories obtained by that book, we may well reckon for one this work of grace and change wrought upon

<sup>1</sup> When the writer was on his way from Cologne to visit the birthplace of Thomas à Kempis, he travelled with a clergyman who was returning to England after a month’s absence, in which time he had taken a continental chaplaincy, and been much by himself. The object of the journey naturally cropped up, and speaking of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ he exclaimed, “Ah, what a heavenly book that is! I always travel with it. I take my Bible and my Prayer-Book and my Thomas à Kempis with me when I leave home.” And in how many other instances is a similar practice followed!

Monsieur de Renty, who also from that time forward had that book in so great love and esteem, that he always carried it about him and made use thereof on all occasions."

The gracious effects which the reading of this book wrought in his soul were so great that it bred and kindled in his heart the thought and desire to quit the world, to consecrate himself entirely to the service of God. Providence, however, ordered it otherwise, for he married and had children, and was also actively engaged in military service; but in every change and condition of life, his heart was wholly given to his Saviour, and in all things he sought to glorify Him and do God's will. Hence it was, as his biographer says of him in another place, many years after his conversion—

"He had no other object before him but Jesus Christ, that he thought not but of Him, that he spake not but of Him, that he fought not but for Him, and always after His sampler,—that he read not but the New Testament, which he carried always with him, and endeavoured by all means possible to engrave the knowledge and love of it on all hearts."

And that this inward life with God his Saviour affected his outward life and behaviour is fully evident from what is further said about him; for his biographer continues:—

"Monsieur de Renty, all the time of his continuing in the army, performed constantly his prayers, and other exercises of devotion, when he came to his quarters, if there was a church there his first care was to visit it, and to do his *devoirs* to our Lord; if there were any religious house he took up there his baggage, and (that he might not incommode) for himself alone, when the army stayed any time in a place; and while many, and such elder than he, passed away their time in gaming, drinking, swearing, and other disorders, he contained him-



self within the bounds of his usual wisdom, avoiding all these base and vicious actions, and entertaining himself in exercises of virtue and honour.

"In every place where he had any power, he wholly employed it in keeping off disorders. He forbade peremptorily his men the ill-treating of their hosts that entertained them, or giving them occasion of complaint. And he never took horse but he made come before him them with whom he quartered to tell him themselves if any had done them wrong: and if he found that any of his had offended, he forthwith saw it remedied, and did right them."

But enough. These memoirs are well worthy of being adapted and republished for the use of English Churchmen.

This example of the change which, under God's blessing, was effected, is the more to be noticed, because it shows how that intense thorough earnestness in religion, set forth and advocated in the '*De Imitatione*,' need not of necessity be confined to the walls of a monastery or convent; and that, without leaving our family, or the calling of life wherein the providence of God has severally placed us, we may find ample scope for the exercise of the most holy and acceptable life to God, as man is able to attain to, and where we may with great advantage follow the godly admonitions, the holy aspirations, the true imitation of Christ, as inculcated in this admirable volume. This example, as many others also that may come to our recollection, should fully persuade us that a life of strict piety, of passionate devotedness to the Saviour,—a life hidden with Christ in God, and not of the world, though in the world,—may be pursued by those engaged in the common affairs of life, and even by those occupying

positions which seem little suited for the promotion of true godliness.<sup>1</sup> When we see what may be done in even a soldier's life, we should be encouraged and incited to great endeavours after holiness of life; and feel assured that nothing ought to hinder us in making repeated attempts to pursue it; and that the difficulties we may have to contend with, situated as some of us may be, and exposed to derision or scorn at times, will—if we have the grace and courage to persevere—only make our light to shine more clearly amid the surrounding darkness of sin and coldness of heart; and while some “forlorn and shipwrecked brother” may take heart, some doubting and careless fellow may be drawn to a better life, by observing our devout conversation and steadfast purpose, we shall hereby the more glorify our Father which is in heaven, and adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, than were we to hide our light by withdrawing from our calling in life, and seeking entire seclusion from the world.

<sup>1</sup> Here we would gladly recall to the minds of our readers instances recorded in our own times, in the Memoirs of Captain Hedley Vears, General Havelock, and Stonewall Jackson, and Commodore Goodenough—men who have made their lives sublime, and been a strength and comfort to those around them, as well as an example to all who shall hear of their pious behaviour and noble conduct.



## CHAPTER IV.

### *The De Imitatione a Precursor of the Reformation.*

THERE is another aspect in which this famous book must be regarded, another field in which it has done good service to the Church of God, and that is, as the harbinger or precursor of the Reformation,—preparing the hearts of men for the coming change, by imbuing their minds beforehand with a true idea of vital religion, and teaching them how to seek God and His mercy independently for themselves without human intervention. At a time when the darkness of ignorance, superstition, and corruption was spreading itself and gathering deepness ; when the Word of God was kept in the background lest men should know the truth ; when the teachers of religion were frequently taken up with abstruse questions, a multiplicity of ceremonies, a formal observance of religious duties, and too often showed that they had not the grace of God within them, if they did not bring a scandal upon religion ; when men were losing sight of the Blessed Saviour, forgetful of His love and tenderness, slighting His death for the atonement of our sins, or making

it of no account without the intercession of the saints and pontifical interest; when men trusted in a round of religious rites and ceremonies as sufficient, and sought the intervention of the priest as necessary to their salvation; when men had indulgences granted for sins, and could purchase deliverance from suffering in the next world with money, wherewith to fill the papal treasury; when abuses prevailed to a frightful extent, and true godliness was often regarded as an offence,—the 'De Imitatione' became a welcome guide and companion to many an earnest layman and devout servant of God yearning for better things. It pointed to the Scriptures as the Word of Divine Truth, to which men should take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in their hearts.' The 'De Imitatione,'

'How excellent are the words it utters on this subject:—

"Happy is he whom Truth by itself doth teach. . . . What availeth it to civil and dispute much about dark and hidden things, for ignorance of which we shall not be reprov'd at the day of judgment?

"What have we to do with *genera* and *species*? He to whom the Eternal Word speaketh is delivered from many vain conceptions.

"From one Word are all things, and all things utter one Word; and this is the Beginning, which also speaketh unto us. No man without that Word understandeth or judgeth rightly. . . . Let all doctors hold their peace; let all creatures be silent in Thy sight; speak Thou alone unto me."—*Imit.* l. 3.

"Truth, not eloquence, is to be sought for in Holy Scripture. Each part of the Scripture is to be read with the same Spirit wherewith it was written."—*Ibid.* l. 5.

This is a point much to be observed, if we would read the Bible to great profit,—to remember that to peruse it aright we need the help of the Spirit through Whom it was written. It is in the same strain that in another book of the 'De Imitatione' the author gives us this beautiful prayer—

"Let not Moses speak unto me, nor any of the Prophets, but do Thou rather speak, my Lord God, the Inspirer and Enlightener of all the Prophets.

"For Thou alone without them canst perfectly instruct me, but they without Thee can profit nothing.

"They indeed may utter words, but they cannot give the Spirit.

"Most beautifully do they speak, but if Thou be silent, they inflame not the heart.

indeed, exhorted people to take counsel with spiritually-minded men about their souls' welfare, and to be guided by them ;<sup>1</sup> but more than this, and above all, the 'De Imitatione' directed every soul personally, for himself or herself, to seek God, to confess their sins unto Him in the secret of their chambers, to look to Him alone for mercy and grace, and to crave His forgiveness and favour ; and in this the author leads the way, and sets us an example to follow.<sup>2</sup> The 'De Imitatione' taught

"They teach the letter, but Thou openest the sense : they bring forth mysteries, but Thou unlockest the meaning of sealed things.

"They declare Thy commandments, but Thou helpest us to fulfil them. They point out the way, but Thou givest strength to walk in it.

"They work only outwardly, but Thou instructest and enlightenest the heart. . . . Let not Moses therefore speak unto me, but Thou, O Lord my God, the everlasting Truth ; lest I die and prove unfruitful."—*Imit.* III. 2.

In the following chapter (the 3d) there is a reproof given to those who do not hear the Word of God. Christ speaks :—

"I cease not even to this day to speak to all ; but many are hardened and deaf to My voice.

"I promise things most high and eternal, and yet the hearts of men remain torpid and insensible."

—words that seem as much needed now at this day as then, and call for a new reformation of life in those that profess godliness.

<sup>1</sup> "Consult with him that is wise and conscientious, and seek to be instructed by a better than thyself, rather than to follow thine own inventions. A good life maketh a man wise according to God, and giveth him experience in many things."—*Imit.* I. 4.

"Lay not thine heart open to every one, but treat of thy affairs with the wise and such as fear God.

"Keep company with the humble and single hearted, with the devout and virtuous ; and confer with them of those things that may edify."—*Imit.* I. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Thus we find the author confessing his own sinfulness to God, and seeking grace both to resist evil and to do that which is right. He indeed magnifies the grace of God, and repudiates the idea of any goodness in himself and in what he does without it.

"What have I deserved for my sins but Hell and everlasting fire ?

"I will lay open my sins against myself, that so the sooner I may obtain mercy at Thy hands.

"What shall I say, being guilty and full of all confusion ? I have nothing to say but this, 'I have sinned : Lord, I have sinned ; have mercy on me ; pardon me ; suffer me a little that I may bewail my grief, before I go into the land of darkness, a land covered with the shadow of death.'"—*Imit.* III. 52.

men to look to Jesus alone as their Saviour, without having other intercessors; to devote themselves to Him unreservedly, and to love Him with an intense absorbing affection above all things else, even with their whole souls.<sup>1</sup> Men are warned not to trust in anything, but in God;<sup>2</sup> and taught that they should not trust in prayers for the dead;<sup>3</sup> or in works of supererogation;<sup>4</sup> and vain professors are reproved for their

"Thy grace, O Lord, and great grace, is needful that nature may be overcome. . . . Neither can I resist the passions thereof, unless Thy most holy grace fervently infused into my heart do assist me.

"O heavenly grace indeed, without which our most worthy actions are nothing, and no gifts of nature are to be esteemed!"—*Imit.* III. 55.

"Jesus will be loved above all things. . . . He that embraceth Jesus shall stand fast for ever. Love Him and keep Him for thy Friend, who will never go away, will not forsake thee, nor suffer thee to perish in the end.

"Keep close to Jesus both in life and death, and commit thyself into His faithful hands. Who, when all fail, can alone help thee.

"Thy Beloved is of that nature that He will not admit of a rival; but will have thy heart alone, and sit like a king on His own throne."—*Imit.* II. 7.

"What can the world profit thee without Jesus? To be without Jesus is a grievous hell; and to be with Jesus is a sweet paradise. If Jesus be with thee no enemy can hurt thee.

"Love all for Jesus, but Jesus for Himself. Jesus Christ alone is to be singularly loved; Who alone is found to be good and faithful above all friends."—*Imit.* II. 8.

"For I have none fully to trust in, none that can seasonably help me in my necessities, but Thee alone, my God . . . for I find all to be weak and momentary, whatever I behold out of Thee. For neither can many friends avail, nor strong helpers aid, nor wise counsellors give any profitable answer; nor the books of the learned comfort, nor any wealth deliver, nor any secret or pleasant place defend, if Thou Thyself dost not assist, help, strengthen, comfort, instruct, and keep us." *Imit.* III. 59.

"Whatever thou reposest in men out of Jesus, is all no better than lost. Trust not, nor rely upon a reed full of wind."—*Imit.* II. 7.

"It is better to have all the world against thee, than Jesus offended with thee."—*Imit.* II. 8.

"Who shall remember thee when thou art dead? And who shall pray for thee? Do now, even now, my beloved, whatsoever thou art able to do: For thou knowest not when thou shalt die, nor yet what shall befall thee after thy death."—*Imit.* I. 23.

"Why dost thou not provide for thyself against that great day of judgment, when no man can excuse or answer for another, but every one shall have enough to answer for himself?"—*Imit.* I. 24.

pride, worldliness, and mere outside appearances of religion.<sup>1</sup> There is no advocacy of Mariolatry, little notice of adoration or prayers made to the saints. No regard is paid to the Pope as the centre of the Catholic Church, though obedience to spiritual superiors is faithfully inculcated. In short, the author seems to proceed on the lines of the old catholic teaching, in opposition to papal corruptions; to go back to primitive Christianity, or rather to the foundations of the Divine Scriptures, for his guidance and inspiration, than to the schools of mediæval theology. One sacred ordinance is prominently urged upon all, and that justly so, being the Holy Communion, ordained by Christ Himself; and it is here set forth not merely as a commemorative rite, but as a means of our continued union with Christ, and as a channel of Divine grace for the souls of the faithful who truly seek Him thereby.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Truly, at the day of judgment we shall not be examined what we have read, but what we have done: not how well we have spoken, but how religiously we have lived."—*Imit.* i. 3.

"Blush, O Sion, saith the sea, and if thou ask the cause, hear wherefore: for a small *prebend* a long journey is taken; for *Everlasting Life* many will scarce lift a foot from the ground."—*Imit.* iii. 8.

"If we esteem our progress in a religious life to consist only in some exterior observances, our devotion will quickly be at an end."—*Imit.* i. 2.

"Some place their religion only in books, some in pictures, some in outward signs and figures. Some (saith Christ) have life in their mouths, but little in their hearts."—*Imit.* iii. 4.

"The wearing a religious habit, and the shaving of the crown, do profit little; but change of manners, and perfect mortification of the passions, make a truly religious man."—*Imit.* i. 17.

"O the admirable and hidden grace of the Sacrament, which only the faithful ones of Christ do know; but the unbelieving, and such as are slaves unto sin, cannot have experience thereof! In this Sacrament spiritual grace is given, and strength which was lost is restored to the soul, and the beauty disfigured by sin returneth again."—*Imit.* iv. 1.

"For this most high and worthy Sacrament is the health of the soul and body, and the remedy of all spiritual weakness; hereby my vices are cured, my passions bridled, temptations overcome or weakened, greater grace is



The whole of the fourth book of the 'De Imitatione' is taken up with helps and instructions for rightly valuing and for rightly receiving this Holy Sacrament; and a better book as "a companion to the altar" we could not have, and the more so if we marked it in such a way as to be available for our private use. Men are taught to consider the Sacrament as "generally necessary to salvation," and to partake of both kinds—the wine as well as the bread—as the sign, and the means of receiving Christ's Body and Blood in the holy rite.<sup>1</sup> But throughout this fourth book, and the other books of the 'De Imitatione' as well, every one is taught that all religious exercises are of no avail without true repentance, and a full purpose to live a new life in Christ; and that no pardon for sin could be obtained, no grace acquired for the soul, no acceptance at God's hands could be had, whilst living in any known sin, or carelessness of life, or apart from Christ.

Thus at a time when the world was too often led to abhor religion, by seeing its professors and ministers

infused, virtue begun increased, faith confirmed, hope strengthened, and love inflamed and enlarged.

"For Thou hast bestowed, and still oftentimes dost bestow, many benefits in this Sacrament upon Thy beloved ones that communicate devoutly, O my God, the Protector of my soul, the Strengtheners of human frailty, and the Giver of all inward comfort."—*Imit.* iv. 4.

"My soul thirsteth to receive *Thy Body and Blood*."—*Imit.* iv. 3.

"They who at first and before communion felt themselves full of anxiety and heartlessness, being refreshed with heavenly meat and drink, do find in themselves a change for the better."—*Imit.* iv. 4.

"Receive me for the honour and glory of Thy name, Thou who hast prepared *Thy Holy and Blood* to be my meat and drink."—*Imit.* iv. 4.

See also Chapter xiv. where it speaks of those who are not able to allay or satisfy their spiritual hunger "but by receiving the *Body and Blood of Christ* with all delight and spiritual eagerness."

using it as but a cloak for covetousness and power, if not for vice, instead of exhibiting in their lives the character and likeness of Christ their Master, and when men were perplexed and distressed by the monstrous assumptions and corruptions of Popery, and by the lack of the true light from the Holy Scriptures to guide them in the way to God and heaven, the 'De Imitatione' exercised a mighty influence in recalling men to a lively sense of true religion, in guiding anxious and inquiring souls aright, and setting before them an example of what real Christianity should be. And many a one was aroused and quickened by it during this dark period through which Christendom was passing, to fly solely to Christ, and cling to Him with their whole soul, and live for Him and with Him, to their great and endless comfort ; and not a few were raised up, through the reading of its pages, to labour for the truth, to stand forth in its defence, and even to die for it. The 'De Imitatione' was the one book of the day before the Reformation which was more read by devout souls than any other, and which most powerfully affected their minds in leading them to seek the light of divine truth, to become personally united to Christ, and to feel the beauty, the worth, the grandeur, and excellence of real holiness and a Christ-like life on earth.

In England the first copy of the 'De Imitatione' we find was printed before the Reformation was effected. The translation was made by Atkinson, as the title informs us, "at the special request and commandment" of the mother of Henry the Seventh. It only contains three of the books. The fourth book was afterwards trans-

lated by Henry's mother. Both were printed by W. de Worde and by Pynson.<sup>1</sup> Luther might have thundered in vain with his denunciations against the iniquities and the errors of Popery, if men's hearts had not been prepared beforehand, and if there had not been those waiting for the sound, and for one to lead them. The intolerable burden that was hung about the necks of those who belonged to the Church might have remained unloosed, and no escape have been found for earnest souls from the thralldom of a spiritual tyranny and of a hollow and vitiated service, had there not been a leaven at work, silently yet surely pervading the minds of a large number yearning for a truer and purer service to God. The '*De Imitations*' had been written well-nigh a hundred years before Luther appeared at the Diet of Worms, where he made his celebrated defence before the Emperor and a vast assemblage of the princes and prelates of Germany, in favour of the Reformation. For even before the close of the fifteenth century, ere the German Reformer had adopted the religious habit or had entered the monastery of the Augustines, the book had passed through many editions, and had become well known in Germany. Erasmus was taught at Deventer, where Thomas à Kempis, eighty years before, had studied in the schools of Florentius; and it was from "the Brothers of the Common Life" who constantly had the book of the '*De Imitatione*' in their hands, and of which fraternity Thomas was a chief ornament, that Erasmus first acquired his views of religion.

<sup>1</sup> Dibdin, *Introduct. to Smit.* p. civ.



"These schools were," says Eichhorn, "the first genuine nurseries of literature in Germany, so far as it depended upon the knowledge of languages, and in them was first taught the Latin, and in process of time the Greek and Eastern tongues."—Hallam's *Introd. Lit. Europe*, i. 109.

And though it cannot be said that Erasmus was a religious man himself, still, from an early period he was imbued with a horror of those abuses which existed in the Church, and distinguished himself by his censures of them, and by his preparing the way for a reformation. That Erasmus sympathised with the first movements of Luther is evident, and it seems more than probable that he was indirectly instrumental in bringing about the Reformation, for the monks whom Erasmus opposed were wont to say, "Erasmus laid the egg which Luther hatched;" and Luther himself acknowledged the value of Erasmus's labours in the publication of the first Greek Testament, and sought to obtain his co-operation in the work of reformation, from which he however kept aloof.<sup>1</sup> The '*De Imitatione*' was also a favourite book with Luther, and often in his hands.<sup>2</sup>

It is not to be expected, however, that this remarkable book, with which these men of note were well acquainted, was entirely free from every tinge of the corruptions of Romanism. Our own Reformation was not clear from them all at once; and there are doubtless a few objectionable passages in the book, to which we shall hereafter allude, and some of which have been

<sup>1</sup> Vide Hook's *Biographical Dictionary*, vol. iv. p. 602. Erasmus never liked, however, to be called a Lutheran, and Luther thought Erasmus a cowardly reformer.

<sup>2</sup> *Modern British Essayist*, vol. iv. p. 274.

properly left out in most of our English editions ; but " take it all in all," it is a marvel in itself, considering the time when it was written, and how free it is from the religious errors which then prevailed in Christendom. As if a light had sprung up amid the surrounding darkness, it was to be a beacon to guide men into the haven of eternal life. It had been kindled by the light of divine Truth, which had furnished its fuel ; for the author, whoever he was, must have been well acquainted with the Scriptures, and must have so diligently studied the Word of God, which was so rarely the case in those days, as to become imbued, not with the mere letter, but the deep spirit of it ; reading it constantly, according to his own precept, by the help of the same Holy Spirit who wrote it. And from the vast number of manuscripts and editions which existed before the period of the Reformation, it is sufficiently evident that the ' *De Imitatione* ' was largely and extensively read ; and by it men were thus moved and trained to a higher, purer, more self-denying, Christ-following life, than they had been, which led them to expect and hasten on the dawn of a better day, when the truth would again shine forth, and, dispelling the mists of error and superstition, should deliver them from a tyranny and degradation singularly paralysing, and cheer and invigorate their souls anew with the Light of life.

## CHAPTER V.

### *A Higher Walk with God in Christ the design of the De Imitatione.*

**B**UT again, let us turn to the book itself awhile, and learn how we ourselves may profit by it. The 'De Imitatione' is a grand inheritance for earnest Christians in these days to possess,—a treasury of devotion instinct with divine truth and holy aspirations. Always so fresh and real, so earnest and elevating, that the more we become acquainted with it, the more we shall prize it. Notwithstanding its sternness in dealing with self, and its positive enforcement of our wills and ways into a conformity with God's will, we are led to feel that it is but the requirement of God's Word, guiding us to the strait gate, and leading us along the narrow way, where we shall have the sunshine of God's presence, the love of Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit ; leading us along a high privileged walk in life, which will bring us much peace, much hope, and sweet blessedness as we journey onwards, guiding us safely at last into the haven of eternal rest.

The book is of special use to us : to turn our know-

ledge of Holy Scripture to real purpose ; to put that Word into practice ; to set us in the way to seek for the attainment of those Christian virtues which are the true outcome of a living faith in Christ. And in this respect it is especially valuable to us, because there is such a danger in this age of ease and self-indulgence, of worldliness and scepticism, of falling into the habit of merely reading the words of Scripture, without having our minds set upon following and giving diligent heed to its teaching. There may be, to many, even a delight in having the beauties of the Bible pointed out, and its meaning in various places explained to us. A theoretical appreciation of its sacred truths may not be wanting, and even a firm persuasion of its solemn demands upon our attention, that when God speaks we should listen with awe and reverence ; but withal there may be a languidness, an easy indifference, a want of holy resolution to obey His Word. Who then, will not find it to be a real help and stay to him to have the counsel and experience of a faithful pilgrim who has passed on his way Zionward before us, and to have him pointing to us afresh the way of obedience, and to listen to his method of fulfilling the precepts of God's Word : to have such a spiritual friend and adviser by our side, in his book, beckoning and calling us onward, rousing us up by his soul-stirring words to renewed endeavours after holiness, to fight manfully against our besetting sins, to watch perseveringly against the spiritual sins of pride, selfishness, discontent, avarice, envy, and alienation of the heart from God by one or other of the many

thousand attractive seductions of earth, and with a resolute purpose to keep our bodily wills and passions in a perfect subjection to God's most holy will! *Religion made easy* is a dangerous course to adopt, and too often but a bypath into the broad road to destruction; and too much worldliness not only gives a distaste for religious exercises, but tends to thrust the love of God out of the soul: it makes a man indifferent about his soul's welfare, obscures his vision of heaven, and lessens his desires after the attainment of eternal life. Too readily are men apt to fall away from grace, and slide, almost imperceptibly to themselves, into a careless and unconcerned state about the things of God and eternity; and we want the still strength of a holy character to look to, a fellow-pilgrim like ourselves, who, by his words and example, will continually awaken us up to holy zeal, diligence, and exertion, that we may be ever pressing forward towards the grand prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. And such an one the author of the '*De Imitatione*' desired to be to his readers; he would come nigh to us and say, "I was like you, a frail and imperfect creature, passing along life's common road, with eternity before me, and I chose, without reserve, the narrow way spoken of by our Saviour. I entered His service, and leaned on Him as my whole hope of salvation. Come, and I will tell you how to seek Him,—how to employ your retirement with God,—how to obtain grace for the soul, wherein you may exercise a godly life;—how you may resist temptation, and wherein you may practise yourself in self-denial, humility, perseverance, and



holiness. Come, and I will show you the good and right way that will lead you safely, amid the snares and traps, the allurements and deceits that beset you, to the heavenly country, to the inheritance of the saints in light."

And let it not be thought that the earnest Christian life is designed for a few only that can leave the world and live in quietness, or a retired life in some solitary cell, or in a monastery or convent. Far from it. It is designed for every one that would gain eternal life. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he should not only believe in God's Word, but do His will also. Whatever his station in life, whatever his circumstances, wherever placed by the providence of God, however employed in the world, if he would be Christ's true soldier and servant, he must fight manfully against sin, the world, and the devil; and set himself with all zeal, diligence, and exertion to copy the life of Christ, and become like Him.

"Christian life's no bank of roses  
Where we idly sit and sing,  
Till the gathering evening closes;  
Christian life's an earnest thing,  
Full of vows, and full of labour,  
All our days fresh duties bring;  
First to God, and then our neighbour;  
Christian life's an earnest thing."<sup>1</sup>

The Holy Scriptures seem specially designed for those who would serve God faithfully whilst abiding in the calling or vocation of life wherein they were

<sup>1</sup> Monseil's *Parish Hymns*.

placed. If we call to mind the saints of God in olden times, we shall find that they nearly all had to mix with the world, and to engage seriously in the battle of life. Most of them had the cares of a family upon them, or had some important earthly duties to perform; and it was whilst endeavouring to discharge these faithfully, that they were therein called to obey and glorify God. Neither Christ nor His apostles encourage those who would become Christians to retire from the world and live as hermits or as monks. They were not led to imagine that Christianity was meant to relieve them from the secular duties or domestic relationships of life, but they were much rather taught to sanctify and ennoble them by living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world.

The 'De Imitatione' seems, indeed, to have been written, in the first instance, for some devout persons that separated themselves from the world, and joining together in a holy brotherhood, designed thereby to live in greater strictness, and more directly to imitate the life of Christ than they imagined that they could do whilst in the world; though in this case, not in that entire seclusion, as it is usually imagined. But it is a great mistake to suppose that the book need to be confined to such,—any more than that the Bible should be reserved for the use of the Clergy only,—and that it will not be eminently serviceable to those following their callings in life. The design of the author was to minister the Word of God to anxious souls; and as a reflex of that Word, it is of special value to those busily engaged in their various duties

in the world. There is a greater need, scope, and opportunity for such as these, than for those secluded in a monastery, for the exercise of all those holy virtues which it so warmly and faithfully inculcates. There will be more room, a wider field for the cultivation and development of all the fruits of the Spirit, and for a full and faithful imitation of Christ our Lord and Master:—

“ If on our daily course our mind  
Be set to hallow all we find,  
New treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice.  
  
Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,  
As more of Heaven in each we see;  
Some softening gleam of love and prayer  
Shall dawn on every cross and care.”<sup>1</sup>

Let not, then, those who are truly anxious to serve and glorify God while on earth, and to gain heaven at last, despise or neglect those helps which God has given them to enable them thus to live. Besides the revelation of His word in the Holy Scriptures, He has given to us the “ministry of the word,”—men specially qualified and appointed to teach us how to obey that Word, and continually to urge us to the fulfilment of it, besides divers helps and ordinances; and all of these, right-minded Christians will devoutly use with great thankfulness. Wisely and gladly, too, will they accept this book of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ when they become fully acquainted with its value, in the light we have hitherto represented it, as a wise guide, a spiritual counsellor, a true friend and companion, to set them

<sup>1</sup> Keble's *Christian Year*.



forward in the way of Life. They will come to regard it with much esteem as a means for moulding and fashioning their lives into a greater conformity to that of Christ's:—directing them how to find a little sanctuary for their souls in every place and condition of their earthly pilgrimage, where they may find Jesus, and obtain fresh grace for their onward journey:—teaching them how to rise above the common level—above the unsatisfying vanities of a worldly carnal life—above the desires and ways of the natural man, to that of a high and heavenly walk with God, where the soul shall gain its native freedom, and bask itself with delight in the refulgent light of the Sun of Righteousness.

It is but little to say that the volume is full of heavenly wisdom, of gems of polished virtue, drawn from a life wholly devoted to God, for there is a peculiar potency and charm in its words, a spirit and a life that pervades its utterances, which readily finds its way to the heart, and stirs it up to renewed endeavours after holiness of life.

## CHAPTER VI.

### *The Beauties of the De Imitatione.*

WE will now, however, attempt to set before the reader some of the beauties to be found in its pages, and a few of the comforts and advantages to be derived from a careful perusal of it.

To those who have begun "the new life," how reasonable and valuable is the advice the author gives, how skilfully does he put before the heavenly pilgrim the way of attaining perfection, in the following passages!—

"Be watchful and diligent in the service of God; and often bethink thyself wherefore thou camest hither, and why thou hast left the world. Was it not that thou mightest live to God, and become a spiritual man?"

"Be fervent then in going forward, for shortly thou shalt receive the reward of thy labours; there shall not be any more fear or sorrow in thy coasts.

"Labour but a little now, and thou shalt find great rest, yea, perpetual joy.

"Thou oughtest to have a good hope of getting the victory; but thou must not be secure, lest thou wax either negligent or proud.

"One thing there is that draweth many back from a spiritual progress, and the diligent amendment of their lives: the fear of the difficulty, or the labour of the combat.

"But they especially do exceed others in virtue, who make the greatest efforts to overcome those things that are most

grievous, and contrary unto them. For there a man improveth most and obtaineth greatest grace, where he most overcometh himself and mortifieth himself in spirit.

"Two things especially much furthereth our amendment, to wit, to withdraw ourselves violently from those vices to which our nature is most inclined, and to labour earnestly for that good which we most lack.

"Be careful also to avoid, with great diligence, those things in thyself, which do commonly displease thee in others. Gather some profit to thy soul wheresoever thou art; so that if thou seest or hearest of any good examples, thou stir up thyself to the imitation thereof.

"How hurtful a thing is it, when the religious neglect the good purposes of their vocation, and busy themselves in that which is not committed to their care.

"Thou hast good cause to be ashamed in looking upon the life of Jesus Christ, seeing thou hast not as yet endeavoured to confirm thyself more unto Him, though thou hast been a long time in the way of God.

"If thou begin to wax lukewarm, it will begin to be evil with thee. But if thou give thyself to fervour of spirit thou shalt find much peace, and feel less labour, by reason of the assistance of God's grace and the love of virtue.

"He that avoideth not small faults, by little and little falleth into greater. Thou wilt rejoice in the evening, if thou have spent the day profitably."—*Imit.* I. 25.

Again we light upon some passages from another part, to warn, counsel, and encourage the Christian as he journeys along the narrow way of life :—

"My son, it is more profitable for thee, and more safe, to conceal the grace of devotion; not to lift thyself on high, nor to speak much thereof, nor to dwell much thereon; but rather to despise thyself, and to fear lest the grace have been given to one unworthy of it.

"It is not only in this that thy progress in spiritual life consists, that thou hast the grace of comfort; but rather that with humility, self-denial, and patience, thou endure the

withdrawing thereof; provided thou do not then become listless in the exercise of prayer, nor suffer the rest of thy accustomed duties to be at all neglected. Rather do thou cheerfully perform what lieth in thee, according to the best of thy power and understanding; and do not wholly neglect thyself because of the dryness or anxiety of mind which thou feelest.

"For there are many who, when things succeed not well with them, presently become impatient or slothful. For the way of man is not always in his power, but it belongeth unto God to give, and to comfort when He will, and how much He will, and as it shall please Him, and no more.

"Some unadvised persons, by reason of their over-earnest desire of the grace of a devoted life, have overthrown themselves; because they attempted more than they were able to perform, not weighing the measure of their own weakness, but following the desire of their heart rather than the judgment of their reason. And because they dwelt on greater matters than was pleasing to God, they therefore quickly lost His grace.

"It is good counsel, that when fervour of spirit is kindled within thee, thou shouldst consider how it will be when that light shall leave thee. And, when this happeneth, then remember that the light may return again, which, as a warning to thyself and for mine own glory, I (Christ) have withdrawn for a time. Such trials are oftentimes more profitable, than if thou shouldst always have things prosper according to thy will. For a man's worthiness is not to be estimated by the number of visions and comforts he may have, or by his skill in the Scriptures, or by his being placed in high station. But if he be grounded in true humility, and full of divine charity; if he be always purely and sincerely seeking God's honour; if he think nothing of and unfeignedly despise himself, and even rejoice more to be despised and made low by others, than to be honoured by them."—*Imit.* III. 7.

What a beautiful and expressive commentary upon those well-known words of St. Augustine, which form an axiom of the deepest spiritual wisdom in the Church of God: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O God,

and our heart is restless till it resteth in Thee ;"—and upon those sweet words of the Psalmist, "Rest in the Lord, and abide patiently upon Him : delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart,"—is to be found in these glowing sentiments of the '*De Imitatione*,' in which we are taught to reach forward and attain to this blessed state :—

"Above all things, and in all things, O my soul, thou shalt rest in the Lord always, for He is the everlasting rest of the saints. Grant me, O most sweet and loving Jesus, to rest in Thee above all creatures, above all health and beauty, above all glory and honour, above all power and dignity, above all knowledge and subtilty, above all riches and arts, above all joy and gladness, above all fame and praise, above all sweetness and comfort, above all hope and promise, above all desert and desire, above all gifts and benefits that thou canst give and impart to us, above all mirth and joy that the mind of man can receive and feel.

"Because thou, O Lord my God, art supremely good above all ; Thou alone art most high, Thou alone most powerful, Thou alone most full and sufficient, Thou alone most sweet and most full of consolation. Thou alone art most lovely and most loving, Thou alone most noble and glorious above all things, in whom all good things together both perfectly are, and ever have been, and shall be.

"And therefore whatsoever Thou bestowest on me besides Thyself, or revealest to me of Thyself, or promisest, is but mean and unsatisfying, whilst Thou art not seen and not fully obtained. For surely my heart cannot truly rest, nor be entirely contented, unless it rest in Thee, and rise above all gifts and all creatures whatsoever. O Thou most beloved spouse of my soul, Jesus Christ, Thou most pure lover, Thou Lord of all creation ; O that I had the wings of true liberty, that I might flee away and rest in Thee ! O when shall it be fully granted me, to consider in quietness of mind, and to see how sweet Thou art my Lord God ! When shall I fully gather up myself into Thee that by reason of my love to Thee I may not feel myself but



Thee alone, above all sense and measure, in a manner not known unto every one! Come, O come; for without Thee I shall have no joyful day or hour; for Thou art my joy, and without Thee my table is empty. A wretched creature am I, and as it were imprisoned and loaded with fetters, until Thou refresh me with the light of thy presence, and grant me liberty, and show a friendly countenance toward me.

"Let others seek what they please instead of Thee; but for me, nothing else doth or shall delight me, but Thou only my God, my hope, my everlasting salvation. I will not hold my peace, nor cease to pray, until Thy grace return again, and Thou speakest inwardly unto me."—*Imit.* III. 21.

What a wonderful insight into the nature of the human heart is exhibited, and what an acuteness of perception we have regarding the mystery of temptation with which it is assailed and tried, in the chapter "On resisting Temptation." Here are some passages for our consideration:—

"There is no man that is altogether free from temptations whilst he liveth on earth, for the root thereof is in ourselves, who are born with inclination to evil. When one temptation or tribulation goeth away, another cometh; and we shall ever have something to suffer because we are fallen from the state of our felicity. Many seek to fly temptations and fall more grievously into them. By flight alone we cannot overcome, but by patience and true humility we become stronger than all our enemies.

"He that only avoideth them outwardly, and doth not pluck them up by the roots, shall profit little; yea, temptations will the sooner return unto him, and will be more violent than before. By little and little, and by patience and long-suffering, through God's help, thou shalt more easily overcome, than by violence and thine own disquietude. Often take counsel in temptations, and deal not roughly with him that is tempted, but give him comfort, as thou wouldest wish to be done to thyself.

"The beginning of all evil temptations is inconstancy of

mind, and small confidence in God. For as a ship without a helm is tossed to and fro by the waves, so the man who is careless and forsaketh his purpose is many ways tempted. Fire trieth iron, and temptation a just man. We know not oftentimes what we are able to do, but temptation shows us what we are. Yet we must be watchful, especially in the beginning of temptation; for the enemy is then more easily overcome, if he be not suffered to enter the door of our hearts, but be resisted at the very gate on his first knocking. Wherefore one said, 'Withstand the beginning;' the remedy is applied too late when the evil has grown strong through long delay.

"For first there cometh to the mind a bare thought of evil, then a strong imagination thereof, afterwards delight, and evil motion, and then consent. And so by little and little our wicked enemy getteth complete entrance for that he is not resisted in the beginning. And the longer a man is negligent in resisting, the weaker does he become daily in himself, and the stronger the enemy against him. Some suffer great temptations in the beginning of their conversion; others in the latter end. Others again are much troubled almost through the whole of their life, and some are but slightly tempted, according to the wisdom and equity of the Divine appointment, which weigheth the states and deserts of men, and ordaineth all things for the welfare of His own chosen ones.

"We ought not therefore to despair when we are tempted, but so much the more fervently to pray unto God that He will vouchsafe to help us in all tribulations; for He will surely, according to the words of St. Paul, make with the temptation a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. In temptations and afflictions a man is proved how much he hath profited; and his reward is thereby the greater, and his graces do more eminently shine forth. Neither is it any such great thing, if a man be devout and fervent, when he feelth no affliction; but if in time of adversity he bear himself patiently, there is hope then of great growth in grace. Some are kept from great temptations, and in small ones which do daily occur are often overcome; to the end that, being humbled, they may never presume on themselves in great matters, while they are worsted in so small things."—*Imit.* l. 13.



How impassioned his devotion, how ardent are his affections towards the blessed Jesus; how deep his sense of the efficacy of Divine Love in the soul, as portrayed in language which flows from the heart!

"Ah, Lord God, Thou holy Lover of my soul, when Thou comest into my heart, all that is within me shall rejoice. Thou art my glory and the exultation of my heart, Thou art my hope and refuge in the day of my tribulation.

"But because I am yet weak in love, and imperfect in virtue, I have need to be strengthened and comforted by Thee; visit me therefore often, and instruct me with all holy discipline. Set me free from evil passions, and heal my heart of all inordinate affections, that being inwardly cured and thoroughly cleansed, I may be made fit to love, courageous to suffer, steady to persevere. The noble love of Jesus impels a man to do great things, and stirs him up to be always longing for what is more perfect. Love desires to be on high, and will not be kept back by anything low and mean. Love desires to be free, and estranged from all worldly affections, that so its inward sight may not be hindered; that it may not be entangled by any temporal prosperity, or subdued by any adversity.

"Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing more courageous, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller nor better in heaven and earth; because love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created things. He that loveth, lieth, runneth, and rejoiceth; he is free and is not bound. He giveth all for all, and hath all in all; because he resteth in One Highest above all things, from Whom all that is good flows and proceeds. He respecteth not the gifts, but loveth himself above all goods unto the Giver.

"Love oftentimes knoweth no bounds, but is fervent beyond all measure. Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility; for it thinks all things lawful for itself, and all things possible. It is therefore able to undertake all things, and it completes many things, and brings them to a conclusion, where he who does not love faints and lies down.

"This ardent affection of the soul which saith, 'My God,

my Love, Thou art mine, and I am Thine,' is a loud cry in the ears of God. Enlarge Thou me in love, that, with the inward palate of my heart, I may taste how sweet it is to love, and to be dissolved, and as it were to bathe myself in Thy love. Let me be possessed by love, mounting above myself, through excessive fervour and admiration. Let me sing the song of love, let me follow Thee, my Beloved, on high; let my soul spend itself in Thy praise, rejoicing through love. Let me love Thee more than myself, and love myself only for Thee: and in Thee all that truly love Thee, as the law of love commandeth, shining out from Thyself."—*Imit.* III. 5.

Those who have known sorrow, or are passing through any kind of trouble, need, sickness, or any other kind of adversity, will not fail to find comfort in the following colloquy between Christ and one of His devoted followers, for its design is to heal the wounded soul, and soothe the anxious and grief-laden breast:—

*Christ.*—"My son, suffer me to do with thee what I please. I know what is expedient for thee. Thou thinkest as man; thou judgest in many things as human affection persuadeth thee.

*The Disciple.*—"O Lord, what Thou sayest is true. Thy care is greater than all the care that I can take for myself. For he standeth but very unsafely, who casteth not all his care upon Thee. O Lord, if only my will may remain right and firm towards Thee, do with me whatsoever it shall please Thee. For it cannot be anything but good, whatsoever Thou shalt do with me. If it be Thy will that I should be in darkness, be Thou blessed; if it should be Thy will, that I should be in light, be Thou again blessed. If Thou vouchsafe to comfort me, be Thou blessed; and if Thou wilt have me afflicted be Thou blessed also.

*Christ.*—"My son, such as this ought to be thy state, if thou desire to walk with Me. Thou oughtest to be as ready to suffer as to rejoice. Thou oughtest as cheerfully to be destitute and poor as to be full and rich.

*The Disciple.*—"O Lord, for Thy sake, I will cheerfully suffer whatsoever shall come on me with Thy permission. From Thy hands I am willing to receive indifferently good and evil, sweet and bitter, joy and sorrow; and for all that befall me I will be thankful. Keep me safe from all sin, and I shall not fear either death or hell. So Thou do not cast me from Thee for ever, nor blot me out of the Book of Life, what tribulation soever befall me shall not hurt me.

*Christ.*—"My son, I descended from heaven for thy salvation; I took upon Me thy sorrows—not necessity but love drawing me thereto, that thou mightest learn patience, and bear temporal sufferings without repining. For from the hour of my birth, even until my death on the Cross, I was not without suffering or grief. I suffered great want of things temporal; I often heard many murmurings against Me; I endured patiently disgraces and revilings; in return for benefits I received ingratitude; for miracles, blasphemies; for heavenly doctrine, reproofs.

*The Disciple.*—"O how great thanks am I bound to render unto Thee, that Thou hast vouchsafed to show unto me, and to all faithful people, the good and the right way to Thine eternal kingdom. For Thy Life is our way, and by the path of holy patience we walk towards Thee, Who art our Crown. If Thou hadst not gone before us and taught us, who would have cared to follow! Alas, how many would have remained behind and afar off, if they considered not Thy glorious example!"—*Imit.* iii. 17, 18.

One great feature in the Christian character, and a means whereby it is greatly perfected, is the bearing the Cross aright after Christ, and this we are taught—nay, sweetly drawn—to do, in these soul-stirring words:—

"Why fearest thou to take up the Cross which leadeth thee to a kingdom?"

"In the Cross is salvation, in the Cross is life, in the Cross is protection against our enemies, in the Cross is the infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the Cross is strength of mind, in the Cross joy of spirit, in the Cross the height of virtue, in the

Cross perfection of sanctity. There is no salvation of the soul, nor hope of everlasting Life, but in the Cross.

"Take up therefore thy Cross and follow Jesus, and thou shalt go into Life Everlasting. He went before bearing His Cross, and died for thee on the Cross, that thou mightest also bear thy Cross and desire to die on the Cross with Him.

"Sometimes thou shalt be forsaken of God, sometimes thou shalt be troubled by thy neighbours; and, what is more, oftentimes thou shalt be wearisome to thyself. Neither canst thou be delivered or eased by any remedy or comfort; but so long as it pleaseth God, thou must bear it. For God will have thee learn to suffer tribulation without comfort; and that thou subject thyself wholly to Him, and by tribulation become more humble. No man hath so in his heart a sympathy with the passion of Christ, as he who hath suffered the like himself. The Cross therefore is always ready, and everywhere waits for thee.

"If thou bear the Cross cheerfully, it will bear thee, and lead thee to the desired end, namely, where there shall be an end of suffering, though here there shall not be. If thou bear it unwillingly thou makest thyself a burden, and increasest thy load, which yet notwithstanding thou must bear. If thou cast away one Cross, without doubt thou shalt find another, and that perhaps more heavy. Thinkest thou to escape that which no mortal man could ever avoid? Which of the saints in the world was without crosses and tribulation?

"Christ's whole life was a cross and martyrdom; and dost thou seek rest and joy for thyself? Set thyself therefore, like a good and faithful servant of Christ, to bear manfully the Cross of thy Lord, who out of love was crucified for thee. As for comforts, leave them to God; let Him do therein as shall best please Him. For our worthiness and the growth of our spiritual estate consisteth not in many sweetnesses and comforts, but rather in the patient enduring of great affliction and tribulations."—*Imit.* II. 12.

With what ecstasie joy does the writer of the 'De Imitatione' contemplate the blessedness of the inheritance of the saints in glory, as if his soul yearned to

be wholly taken up with the beatific vision, like the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration with Christ !—

“O most blessed mansion of the city which is above! O most clear day of eternity, which night obscureth not, but the highest truth ever enlighteneth! O day ever joyful, ever secure, and never changing into a contrary state! O that that day would once appear, and that all these temporal things were at an end! To the saints it shineth, glowing with everlasting brightness, but to those that are pilgrims on the earth it appeareth only afar off, and as it were through a glass. The citizens of heaven do know how joyful that day is; but the banished children of Eve bewail the bitterness and tediousness of this.

“O merciful Jesus, when shall I stand to behold Thee? When shall I contemplate the glory of Thy kingdom? When wilt Thou be unto me all in all? O when shall I be with Thee in Thy kingdom, which Thou hast prepared for Thy beloved from all eternity?

“I long to enjoy Thee in my inmost soul, but I cannot attain unto it. My desire is that I may be wholly given to things heavenly, but temporal things and unmortified passions weigh me down.

“Succour me, O Thou the Everlasting Truth, that no vanity may move me. Come to me, Thou heavenly sweetness, and let all impurity flee from before Thy face.”—*Imit.* III. 48.

There are many scattered pieces of rare spiritual excellence, which are worthy of some special notice, because they have proved serviceable to the Christian in his endeavours to follow Christ and attain eternal life. Here are a few which will be useful to him :—

“In silence and in stillness a religious soul profiteth much, and learneth the mysteries of Holy Scripture.”—*Imit.* I. 20.

“There is no true liberty nor right gladness but in the fear



of God, accompanied with a good conscience. Happy is he that can avoid all distracting impediments, and bring himself to the one single purpose of holy compunction. Happy is he that can abandon all that may defile or burden his conscience. Resist manfully; one custom overcometh another."—*Imit.* i. 21.

Christ is represented as saying to the soul:—

"My son, thou art not able always to continue in the more fervent desire of virtue, nor to persist in the higher pitch of contemplation; but thou must needs sometimes, by reason of original corruption, descend to inferior things, and bear the burden of this corruptible life, though against thy will, and with wearisomeness. . . . Then it is expedient for thee to flee to humble and outward works, and to refresh thyself with good actions, to await with a firm confidence My coming and heavenly visitation, to bear patiently thy banishment and the dryness of thy mind, till I shall again visit thee, and set thee free from all anxieties. For I will cause thee to forget thy painful toils, and enjoy thorough inward quietness."—*Imit.* iii. 51.

There are occasional interruptions to religious duties in every life, and particularly in the life of those who are engaged in some worldly calling, or who are in any degree bound up in the family circle; how needful and seasonable is such a word of advice as the following, to keep us from falling away through such intermissions, and to brace us up afresh to renewed endeavours:—

"If an accustomed exercise be sometimes omitted, either for some act of piety, or profit to my brother, it may easily afterwards be recovered; but if out of slothfulness of mind, or out of carelessness, we lightly forsake the same, it is a great offence against God, and will be found prejudicial to ourselves."—*Imit.* i. 19.

In times of dryness of soul, of doubts, and of trials,

how reassuring are such words as these, coming as it were from Christ Himself!—

“ Believe in Me, and put thy trust in My mercy. When thou thinkest thyself furthest off from Me, oftentimes I am nearest unto thee.

“ When thou judgest that almost all is lost, then oftentimes the greatest advantage of gaining is at hand. All is not lost when anything falleth out contrary.

“ Thou must not judge according to that thou feelest at the present; nor so take or give thyself over to any grief from whencesoever it cometh, as though all hope of delivery were quite gone.”—*Imit.* III. 30; see also *Imit.* II. 9.

How important is the caution here given, not to rest in outward things for our advancement in grace :—

“ If we esteem our progress in a religious life to consist in some exterior observances, our devotion will quickly come to an end. But let us lay the axe to the root, that being freed from passions, we may find rest unto our souls.”—*Imit.* I. 11.

Again :—

“ He that can live inwardly and make small reckoning of outward things, neither requireth places nor dependeth upon times for performing religious exercises.

“ The spiritual man quickly recollecteth himself, because he never poureth out himself wholly to outward things. He is not hindered by outward labour or business which may be necessary for the time. But as things fall out, so he frameth himself unto them.”—*Imit.* II. 1.

How accurately does the writer depict the instability of the heart of man whilst here unfolding to us the deceit which it practises upon us, and how it is to be overcome !—

“ Oftentimes a man doth earnestly labour for that which he desireth: and when he hath gotten it, he beginneth to be of another mind; for men's affections do not long continue fixed upon one thing, but do pass from one to another.



"It is therefore no small thing for a man to forsake himself even in the smallest things. The true spiritual profiting of a man consisteth in denying himself, and he that is thus resigned, liveth in great freedom and security."—*Imit.* III. 39.

The things that make or mar a man's peace in life are very forcibly inculcated, and in the following passages we are taught what disposition of soul we should foster, and what avoid, as ever we hope to obtain true rest :—

"Whenever a man desireth anything inordinately, he is presently disquieted within himself. The *proud* and *covetous* can never rest. The poor and humble in spirit live together in peace. The man that is not perfectly dead to himself is quickly tempted and overcome in small and trifling things.

"True quietness of heart is therefore gotten by resisting our passions, not by obeying them. There is no peace in the heart of a carnal man, nor of him that is devoted to outward things, but in the spiritual and fervent man."—*Imit.* I. 6.

"Thus saith thy Beloved : I am thy *Safety*, thy *Peace*, and thy *Life*. Keep thyself with Me, and thou shalt find peace. Forsake therefore all earthly things, and labour to please thy Creator, and be faithful unto Him, that thou mayst attain unto the true happiness."—*Imit.* III. 1.

These sentiments are quite in keeping with the admonition given in the first book, and show a unity of thought which leaves upon us an impression that they proceed from one and the same mind. Thus we read there :—

"Leave vain things to the vain, but be thou intent upon those things which God hath commanded thee.

"Shut thy door upon thee, and call unto thee Jesus thy Beloved. Stay with Him in thy closet ; for thou shalt not find so great peace anywhere else."—*Imit.* I. 20.

And now we will but cull out a few choice passages

from various places, and weave them together, that they may form a garland of Rules for holy living, wherewith the Christian may learn to adorn his soul.

1. "Every day renew thy holy resolutions, and excite thyself to more animated fervour, as though this were the first day of thy conversion, and say, 'Assist me, O Lord God, in my resolutions to devote myself to Thy holy service, and grant that this day I may begin to walk perfectly, because all I have hitherto done is nothing.'"

2. "In the evening examine thy behaviour, what thou hast been, in *thought, word, and deed*, for in all these perhaps thou hast offended God and thy brother."

3. "On the eve of the principal Feasts thou shouldst stir thyself up to holy exercises, and prepare to live more devoutly, as if thou wert to depart out of this world."

4. "Be mindful of the profession thou hast made, and have always before the eyes of thy soul the remembrance of thy Saviour crucified."

5. "Of the words and deeds of others judge nothing rashly; neither do thou entangle thyself with things not intrusted to thee."

6. "Be resigned with thy whole heart, in all situations, to the will of God; rest is not to be found but in humble submission to the divine will; a fond imagination of being easier in any place than that which Providence has assigned thee, and a desire of change, founded upon it, are both deceitful and tormenting."

7. "Thou shouldst be attentive to the temptations that are peculiar to thine own spirit, and persevere in watchfulness and prayer, lest 'thy adversary, the devil,' find some unguarded place, where he may enter with his delusions."

8. "Resist thine inordinate desires in their birth, and continually lessen the power of thy evil habits, lest they increase in strength, in proportion as they are indulged, and grow at length too mighty to be subdued."

9. "Associate only with the humble and simple, the holy and devout, and let thy conversation with them be on subjects that tend to the perfection of thy spirit."

10. "Endeavour to be always patient of the faults and imperfections of others, for thou hast many faults and imperfections of thine own that require a reciprocation of forbearance."

11. "That thou mayest live in purity and peace, rate the whole world as nothing, and abstract thy thoughts and desires from its cares and pleasures; for thou canst not live to Christ whilst thou delightest in the transitory enjoyments of time and sense; consider thyself, therefore, as a stranger and pilgrim in the world."

12. "Love Christ above all others; the love of Jesus is a noble and generous love, prompting to difficult attempts, and kindling the desire of greater perfection; it constantly looketh up towards heaven, it abhors the restraints of its earthly prison, it panteth after its original and native freedom."

"Dear brother, cast not away the hope of attaining to this spiritual state. Arise this moment from the deadly sleep of sin, and say, Now is the time of action, now is the day of battle, now the season of amendment, 'the accepted time, the day of salvation.'"

These selections from the 'De Imitatione' will, we trust, lead the reader to a more constant and devout study of the book. Though there be a remarkable simplicity of thought and expression in it, there is still great acuteness of perception, and much profound reasoning, that cannot fail to have an influence on those desirous to grow in grace and in a devout personal acquaintance with our Saviour Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER VII.

### *The Reasons for inquiring into the Authorship.*

IF then this book,—rich with the golden counsels of perfection, to ennoble and beautify the character and soul of man—rich with its unfoldings of the hidden life with Christ—rich in the peaceable fruits of righteousness which it has yielded in past generations—rich in the blessings it has brought to thousands, along the stream of time, as it has come down to our own age,—if this book, then, can, with any degree of certainty, be traced up to any one, surely it is most desirable to do so; surely there is something more than mere curiosity in our wish to know who he really is, and to learn somewhat of the circumstances under which it was written, to find out what has invested it with a life and interest peculiarly its own, and whether it does not embody the pure and steady devotions of one who,—in the midst of much corruption and ungodliness in the world around,—combined with a few earnest souls in an endeavour to set forth the true idea of the Christian life, by manifesting in their own lives the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel of Christ their Lord and Master, to Whom they unreservedly

gave themselves. It is worth some effort and research to do this ; and few who know the book, and value it, but will be anxious and pleased to discover, if they can, with any degree of probability, who the author of it is.

Without forestalling the evidence, or giving any positive decision at present, we cannot help observing that the claims of Thomas à Kempis seem to us considerably to preponderate over those of any other. And we give ample notice that we design to set forth these claims in the clearest light we can, and if possible to establish them in the face of the many objections which have been eagerly seized upon to make them appear improbable, and notwithstanding the pretensions put forth in behalf of other individuals, and the voluminous evidence which has been adduced to support these pretensions. We wish it to be understood that we purpose to do our best to overthrow these supposititious claims, believing that they have no substantial basis ; and to bring forward all those solid proofs and arguments which can be advanced in support of Thomas à Kempis. We feel justified in taking this course, and even constrained to do so, because the claims of Thomas à Kempis need to be brought forward into greater prominence, and their value to be openly weighed. They have been hidden amidst the mass of frivolous pretensions, as it were like the honest grain under a large amount of chaff, which have from time to time been imported into the controversy. For as the history of it shows, Thomas à Kempis was originally in possession of the title to

the authorship, and that false measures were adopted to dispossess him of it. In the very first attempt that was made, about two hundred years after the time when the first manuscripts appeared, the evidence was proved to be erroneous and could not be sustained. The copy of the 'De Imitatione' which was supposed to be written before Thomas à Kempis was born, and to have been in possession of the Monastery of Arona ere Thomas could have written it, was clearly shown to have been brought there later by nearly a hundred and fifty years than the time when Thomas is thought to have composed it; and therefore it fails to damage his credit as the author of the book. This is sufficiently seen in the position taken by the learned Bellarmine at the time, who, being at first carried away with the erroneous impressions put forth, was afterwards so convinced that the idea of there being a manuscript copy of the 'De Imitatione' older than the time of Thomas à Kempis was false, and founded on a mistake, that he changed his views upon the matter, and, espousing the cause of Thomas, declared, as we shall show, that the question was from that time settled in his favour.

There were however, and have since been, a few persons connected with certain religious Orders, who, with an obstinacy almost unparalleled in literary history, have refused to allow that Thomas has any claim to the authorship, whilst they have zealously advocated the claims of other individuals upon the barest of all probabilities. They seem to have come to a settled determination beforehand that let what might be said



in support of Thomas à Kempis, whether it be the most convincing testimony in his behalf that could be produced or not, they will oppose it, and still cling to some one else. And so unreasonable were they, and so irrepressible, that notwithstanding the final judgment of Bellarmine against them, and the decision of the Parliament of Paris, after several hearings, that they should not publish the 'De Imitatione' under any other name than that of Thomas à Kempis, that they still, without any authority, reason, or sense, and with the boldest effrontery,—having bided a time,—issued copies of the 'De Imitatione' under the name of Gersen. This called forth the indignant protest of Thomas Carre, Confessor to the Canonesses Regular of St. Augustine at Paris, who, in a preface to some Meditations and Prayers by Thomas à Kempis published in 1664 (Paris), thus speaks :—

"While this small work was almost come out of the press, and I lived in assurance that Thomas of Kempis, the author thereof, was at length left in peaceable possession of his own works (in particular that of 'The Following of Christ'), a new edition of the same book happened to fall into my hands, under this exploded author, John Gersen, Abbot of Vercelli, where yet the publisher thereof (high-flown, as it should seem, in his thoughts) judged that whate'er liked him should pass for lawful, and what pleased him should please the world, pleased to deliver us no other account of his unjust usurpation (after he had been hissed out of the Court of Parliament of Paris, for want of making proof against an ancient and known possession, and this too after three long and fair audiences), but this forsooth, 'Whosoever shall question or contest this may receive satisfaction from the learned Abbot Cajétan, the R. F. Francis Walgrave, and other invincible champions of this opinion.' Thus boldly he. But who, I pray, were these, but *parties in*



*causa!*—the two Benedictines that pleaded and lost the Gersen's cause in the Court of Parliament in the hearing of at least 500 witnesses, so that this proceeding comes but aptly home to the proverb: 'Ask my fellow whether I be a thief.' Howbeit, since these two must needs be cast in our way, I will yet again repeat in short, part of what they have heard at large in my reply to their imaginations, in a book put out in Latin, printed at Paris, 1651, under this title, '*Thomas de Kempis a seipso restitutus una cum repetitionibus Thomæ Carre,*' etc., where every trivial objection of the said Abbot Cajétan and R. F. Walgrave is answered at large, and our ancient possession vindicated.'"

Since then the old errors have been again and again revived, even to the present time, and brought forward as if they had never been refuted. They have been dressed up afresh, with occasionally new arguments; and sometimes additional testimonies have been advanced which seem for a time to stagger one, as if the claims of Thomas à Kempis must collapse; but which further investigation has shown to be as worthless and baseless as those suppositions that had been formerly conjectured. But the reader shall have the opportunity of judging about the whole matter for himself; it shall be laid before him, as we have intimated, in all its hearings.

Whether he will be convinced by the present research into the controversy, and the evidence that will be adduced in favour of Thomas à Kempis, we shall not now undertake to say; it must be allowed, however, that the cause of Thomas should be clearly represented, and that the English public should know what proofs can really be brought forward to attest his authorship.

That the saintly man—whether it were Thomas à Kempis or no—did not attach his name at the first to the book as its author, and that copies of it, or portions of it, should get abroad without the author's name being put to them, leaving it for the conjecture of the copyist or printer, if so disposed, and thereby undoubtedly causing much error and confusion, is to be regretted; but it is no reason why he should be eventually despoiled of what is his due, if authentic testimony can be brought to establish his right to the authorship. There is in the minds of all true men a desire to see justice done to others, and we doubt not but they will find a satisfaction in having this question fairly investigated and finally settled, with some degree of certainty, so that the honour which belongs to the writer of this valuable book may be duly given to him. He is now beyond the reach of all praise, neither can his soul's health nor the composure of his mind be in anywise affected by the world's knowledge of the truth respecting the matter, nor can any celebrity arising from his being the author of this remarkable book interfere with his holy life and actions, which are ended.

On the other hand, God may be glorified in His saint, when the writing of this book is, with a degree of certainty, assigned to some one individual; and men may learn hereby also, how much of grace and holiness of life may be attained to in this world—how much precious love of the Saviour, and sweet consciousness of His presence, may be found in a life hid with Christ in God. Nay, is there not all the more reason why those who admire the '*De Imitatione*,' and have

an benefited and drawn nearer to God by it, should be all the more zealous for the honour of the author, and stand up in his defence, as a tribute to his memory, and as a testimony in behalf of one who has wrought good work in them, when others would rob him of the credit of having written it. We contend, moreover, that the 'De Imitatione' itself will possess, in the minds of its devout readers, a greater value and interest, when we can discover, with some probability of truth, the individual who wrote it. For when it can be shown to us that it is not merely a collection of devout sayings and spiritual breathings, selected from the writings of various pious souls, by some unknown individual, who had strung the words together in their present shape, but, that the thoughts and sentiments of this sacred manual had their origin in the mind of one who is known to have been peculiarly devoted to God, and lived with others, in much singleness of soul, then it will acquire a value and attraction which many a reader might not otherwise find in it, for when reading it, or perusing a chapter of it in the solitude of his chamber, he will feel,—upon the principle that example is better than precept,—that it sets forth the experience, and the outcome of the spiritual life of one whom it would be well for him to follow. A similar sentiment to this has been clearly and admirably expressed in the preface to a volume of sermons entitled *The Companions for the Devout Life*, where the writer says:—

"It may be doubted whether the 'De Imitatione' would have enjoyed all its popularity if it had been received by the

66 *The Authorship of the De Imitatione Christi.*

Christian world as a mere fasciculus of pious thoughts, precepts, and aspirations, gathered by some one or other from various sources, instead of as the original work of a particular (but very doubtful) author, Thomas à Kempis, of whose history and character not one reader in a thousand knows anything whatever."—*Preface to St. James's Lectures*, p. 8.

A passage which at once seems to necessitate the present inquiry, as to whether Thomas à Kempis be the author, which may lead many to think that instead of its being "very doubtful," it is *very probable* that he was ; and, at the same time, to call for some account of his life and surroundings, that the Christian world may know something more than it does at present of him to whom this book has been most frequently attributed.

## PART II.

INDIVIDUALS ACCREDITED WITH THE AUTHORSHIP;  
AND A LENGTHENED INQUIRY INTO THE CLAIMS  
OF THE TWO MOST OPPOSED TO THOMAS À KEMPIS.

### CHAPTER VIII.

*Some of the Individuals to whom the De Imitatione  
has been assigned.*

THOMAS À KEMPIS, the most generally received author of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' was born in the year 1379, at a little village called Kempen, in the diocese of Cologne, from which he received his latter name,—that of his father being John Haemmerlein or Hemercken. His parents were in humble circumstances, and brought their children up in the ways of cheerful piety and loving obedience. And when Thomas was nearly thirteen years of age he was sent to Deventer, to the religious community lately formed there, called "The Brothers of Common Life." Here he became an excellent scholar; and was a great favourite with the Principal, Dr. Florentius Radewin, from whom he gathered much godly counsel, and was greatly encouraged to devote himself entirely to God's service. Upon the death of Florentius he joined a

branch of the community at Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, which had been recently established, and of which his brother John was the first Prior. This happened when Thomas was nearly twenty years old. He remained here as a novice for about five more years, and then, in the year of our Lord 1405, he took upon him the habit and the order of St. Augustine. He was also made a Canon-Regular of this order. In 1413, when about thirty-three years old, he received Holy Orders; and the year after he wrote out his first Missal. His great labour, however, consisted in writing out the whole of the Bible in four volumes. This occupied him fifteen years, and the last volume was finished in 1439. The year after he had commenced it, i.e. in 1425, he was made Sub-Prior of the monastery. Four years after this, i.e. in 1429, he and his brethren were driven from their monastery, and had to wander about wherever they could find a home for nearly three years. It was however some little time before this, and before he began to copy out the Bible, that he is considered to have written the '*De Imitatione Christi*,' or some of the books, i.e. between 1415 and 1420, and this would be shortly after he had taken Holy Orders. He rarely left the monastery; and with the exception of the period of forced expulsion, and a few short visits at other times, he continued there for nearly seventy years, "particularly eminent for his piety, humility, diligent study of the Holy Scriptures, austerity of life, moving eloquence in discourse, and extraordinary zeal in prayer." He lived to be ninety-two, and died in the year 1471.



Such is a brief outline of the life of Thomas à Kempis—a life which has an intrinsic value of its own, the light of which shines with such an intense glow of devotion and concentrated love to the Saviour, that it must have a singular potency of kindling and keeping alive a flame of sacred fervour in other souls, and teaching them how to enter upon, and to persevere in, the new life which reaches forward into the Eternal. Such biographies are necessarily few, but they are the more rare, precious, and of surpassing interest to the earnest Christian.

But the name of Thomas à Kempis is chiefly known from its having been associated with that inimitable book of devotion, the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*,’ as its reputed author. There are many manuscripts and editions of the book which bear ample testimony to this; and evidences of various kinds will be brought forward to support his claim. We have, however, sufficiently intimated that his claim has been very warmly disputed, and that other persons have been severally preferred as the authors of it. It cannot be doubted, however, for in the midst of all the controversy it has never been questioned—that Thomas à Kempis wrote out a copy of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ in the year 1441, and was consequently well acquainted with its contents, and seems from his life to have lived according to its holy counsels. This copy is still in existence, and is of great value, and will hereafter be brought forward in support of the claim of Thomas à Kempis, but not exactly in the way imagined by his opponents. The copy is attested by Thomas himself,

having this subscription, "Finitus et completus Anno Domini 1441 per manus Thomæ à Kempis in Monte S. Agnet. prope Zwoll." But though the authenticity of this has never been doubted, it is nevertheless assumed by many to be nothing more than the signature of the copyist, and not the sign-manual of the veritable but humble author.

And when it is advanced that Thomas à Kempis signed the Bible which he had written out with his own name at the end, in a similar manner to that which he had attached to the codex wherein the 'De Imitatione' is written, it does seem, on the first glance of the case, that as he was only the copyist in the one instance, so he must have been also in the other. We are willing to admit that thus viewed it does carry with it this appearance. Yet in saying this, we do not in any wise give up the claim made in his behalf, that he is the real author; but, as we are interested in having a fair inquiry instituted, we do not purpose to contend for anything in his favour that is unreasonable or unlikely: and we desire to give all due consideration to what is advanced against his claim by his opponents. The case must stand or fall on its own merits. We are, above all things, concerned to have the question fully considered; and that Thomas à Kempis should only be fully accepted when his title can be clearly proved, to the exclusion of all others.

If Thomas à Kempis did really compose the 'De Imitatione,' we do not see how the fact of it could be entirely kept secret from those with whom he lived on

such intimate terms as he did at Mount St. Agnes. If he had copied it from the work of another author, they would, in some way or another, have seen or heard of it. It would be difficult to keep the matter hidden so completely in such a community, even if Thomas had desired to do so. That the signature of this copy of 1441 was probably regarded not as the signature to certify that Thomas was the author, but only that this particular one was copied by him,—for it is not unlikely that he should copy out again his own works,—is apparent from the fact, that copies known to have been made from this manuscript are without the name of the author. It was not considered material, nor does the author appear to have desired it. The author of the book probably judged himself to be of no reputation, and wished that the blessing to be derived from it might not be lessened by his own insignificance or obscurity. This we may infer from his own words when he said :—

"Let not the authority of the writer be a stumblingblock, whether he be of great or small learning; but let the love of pure truth draw thee to read it. Inquire not who spoke this or that, but mark what is spoken."—*Imit.* I. 5.

This very fact, however, in not publishing his name to the book, led to much confusion and misconception. Many copies of the 'De Imitatione' went abroad without any name; and those at a distance not knowing to whom it belonged, but wishful to attach some author's name to it, so as to make it more acceptable to the public, put the name of the one they thought most likely to have written it, or some one

that was famous for his piety and learning. On no other grounds can the number of the various individuals to which it is attributed be accounted for.

There are then, at the first view of the question, confessedly difficulties in the way, which will make any one who has not thoroughly considered it speak with some hesitation as to the actual authorship of the book. The many claims which have been made in behalf of the several other devout persons—and some with much apparent probability—will prevent those who are most in favour of Thomas à Kempis speaking with any absolute certainty until they know more about the actual state of the controversy; and will cause them not to be too positive about his being the veritable composer. Still, after having well considered and well weighed the evidence respecting this matter, there are not a few, doubtless, who will feel sufficiently satisfied in their own minds, to rest content with the most generally received opinion, that the work was originally composed or compiled by Thomas à Kempis, notwithstanding the conflicting testimony which has arisen.

There is one point, however, to be taken into consideration, which may help to explain some of the seeming contradictions in the evidences brought forward, and which those who attribute the '*De Imitatione*' to Thomas à Kempis are willing to admit as an abatement, if so it may be accounted, to the credit of his authorship,—though it will detract nothing from the merit of the work itself, but rather enhance it,—

inasmuch as it may be said that he gives us the distilled wisdom of many devout souls,—and that is, what we gather from his writings, that he was in the constant habit early in life of putting down in his little table-books, from time to time as they arose, not only his own thoughts and experiences in the religious life, but also whatever good thing he heard from others whom he considered well versed in the Christian life, and what he observed in the conduct of other pious persons with whom he conversed, as also what he learnt or selected from the writings of wise and godly men. Whatever he thought worthy of notice, whatever he felt to be worth remembering for the advancement of the soul in the divine life, he treasured up, that at some future time it might be of use to himself or others; and which, in after years, he doubtless employed, digested, or worked up, after much prayerful and devout consideration, into some of the many little devotional books which he certainly wrote. It is thus that, having stored his mind with sacred wisdom, he out of the good treasure within brought forth words of peculiar efficacy. Thus, in the preface to *The Soliloquy of the Soul*, which has always been regarded as having been written by Thomas à Kempis, there is an illustration of his method in compiling the book. Its direct quaintness and simplicity are very refreshing, and it will give the reader an idea of the manner in which the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ if his work, was also probably written. It is here, to a certain extent, transcribed:—

“For my own private consolation,” says Thomas à Kempis,



"I have here collected together some devout sentences into a little book, which I wished to treasure up in my heart, and which I have so disposed that they may be as a delightful retreat or garden that is planted with divers sorts of trees, and is beautified with the fairest flowers, into which I might from time to time enter, and choose matter for reading and meditation in time of necessity, for the refreshing of my soul, when overcome with languor or oppressed with sorrow. And that I might clearly and readily find out, at any time, under what tree I should rest, or what flower it would be more grateful to gather for reading, I have taken care to distinguish the various sections of each chapter with coloured letters or titles. Also the kinds of discourses are different; sometimes simply speaking, sometimes disputing, sometimes praying, sometimes holding conference, now in my own person, now in that of another, I have endeavoured to adopt an easy style in the treatise."

We are not, however, to presume from this passage, and from what has been said, that the words he wrote did not come fresh from his own mind, or that he mainly used the words of other people which he strung together; but this, that he did not write, as a theme or lecture or sermon is written, long continuous portions at one time, one sentence holding on to another, and where many passages are necessary to complete the sense; but that he gave in short sentences the pith or result of his thoughts and meditations; and from time to time put them down under certain heads as they were matured in his mind; thus he compiled his works, evidently, and may thus be termed a compiler, not in the sense now used, of employing other men's words, but of noting down his own thoughts and devotions.

The reader is to judge for himself, however, what probability there is of Thomas à Kempis being the



real author of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' and in what degree he may be regarded as such, when we come to investigate his claims. In the meanwhile it will be well for us, first, to take a brief review of the claims which have been advanced in behalf of other individuals, and how they are supported. And in stating and examining these titles to authorship, we purpose to touch only upon the salient points of the controversy, and reduce it to as simple and clear a compass as it is possible. The claims of two individuals, however, have been advocated with some speciousness of probability, and these we must look into more at length, and examine more particularly, as they would otherwise greatly prejudice the right of Thomas à Kempis, and must not therefore be allowed to pass unchallenged.

There is something more than mere curiosity in the question, and in the endeavour to discover, if possible, with some degree of certainty, whose words we are listening to; because, as it has been beautifully said, "it would be instructive to learn what was the life, and what the conditions from which have flowed utterances so sweet and pure." And there is not only greater interest in reading the works of one whose life is somewhat known to us, but his words come with more force and freshness.

Among those who have been named as having some title to this distinction—a few having apparently a better claim than the others—we may mention the following in addition to Thomas à Kempis:—

2. SAINT BERNARD, the illustrious Abbot of the Monastery of Clairvaux in the twelfth century, who

died in 1153, is the most ancient of all, and seems to have been the one who was considered by some to have the *first* possession of the title to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione Christi;' at least, it was under his name, says a learned critic, that the first edition we have of the Treatise, printed at Bresse in the year 1485, appeared;<sup>1</sup> and this was doubtless taken from a manuscript older than that date. It was under the name of St. Bernard also that the very first translation of it was made into *French*; for, in the Inventory of John Count of Angoulême and Périgieux, drawn up in 1467, which is kept in the Chamber of Accounts in Paris, under the title *Inventaire des Livres trouvez en l'Armoire de feu Monseigneur, le 1 jour de Janvier l'an 1467*, there is found at the end of it a certain work entitled *La Imitation de S. Bernard, avec plusieurs Oraisons et Devotions en Papier et Lettre commune et bien caduque*; i.e. "The Imitation of St. Bernard, with several prayers and devotions in common paper and letters, somewhat faded." From hence, then, it appears that this manuscript was old in the year 1467; and consequently this version must have been a long time in existence, and made from a manuscript bearing the name of St. Bernard.<sup>2</sup> Wherefore, in the first *French* edition of the 'De Imitatione,' which was printed at Paris A.D. 1493, it is remarked, that till then this book had been generally, at least in France, attributed to St. Bernard or to Gerson. The

<sup>1</sup> The learned critic was mistaken in this respect; as it will be seen further on, that there were other editions of earlier date than the one he names.

<sup>2</sup> Some allusion is made to this manuscript in a letter written in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xlii. p. 559.

title of the book runs thus, "Here begins the most salutary book, intituled 'De Imitatione Jesu Christi,' which hath been even to this present day (*jusque à present*) attributed to St. Bernard, or else to Dr. John Gerson." And in another edition published at Paris in or about the year 1500, the title is, "The book of the Imitation of our Lord, attributed to St. Bernard or to John Gerson, translated from Latin into French." Besides which there are said to be several manuscripts extant to this day, wherein the same is attributed to St. Bernard, particularly one in the library of St. Geneviève, ms. num. 413, mentioned by M. Ellies Dupin, in his *Dissertation sur l'Auteur de l'Imitation de J. C.*, which was then judged to be between two and three hundred years old. And in the Registry of the Monastery of Melice there is mention also made of a manuscript volume, in which, after the first book of the 'De Imitatione,' follows St. Bernard's *Meditations on the Passion*. Nay, in a manuscript bearing a more ancient date than any that are known, one book of the 'De Imitatione' is joined with a piece that is undoubtedly St. Bernard's.

Much, therefore, can be said in favour of St. Bernard being the author of the 'De Imitatione,' and as he lived more than two hundred years before Thomas à Kempis or Gerson the Chancellor of Paris—and the former is known to have copied many of Bernard's works,—the claims of these latter persons, as well as that of others, must come to nothing, if it can be established that St. Bernard wrote the 'De Imitatione,' or even a part of it; and then it must be confessed

that they merely copied what had been composed by him some time previously.

Yet notwithstanding the array of proofs in favour of St. Bernard, the learned author from whose work these notes are extracted says, that "it is impossible to maintain that the 'Imitatio' is the work of St. Bernard;" and the copy of one of those manuscripts alluded to above gives us, he thinks, a demonstrative proof that it is not his: for in the fiftieth chapter of the third book of the 'De Imitatione,' there are these words at the end, "*ait humilis S. Franciscus.*"<sup>1</sup> Now, as St. Bernard died in the year 1153, and St. Francis was not born till A.D. 1182, and died A.D. 1226, St. Bernard, it is clear, could not write about some one who was not in existence till some years after his death; if therefore the words above alluded to really occur in the body of the original work it is a sufficient proof that it was not written by St. Bernard. But to this it is replied that the name of St. Francis might have been first set in the margin, and thence have crept into the text. The maxim here cited from the 'De Imitatione' is indeed by Bonaventure ascribed to St. Francis; but this is no more than a simple conjecture grounded upon the saying of Bonaventure, which may as likely belong to some others as to him; being an ordinary maxim, which St. Francis, or any other person, might have taken up. The maxim referred to is this, "For how much every one is in Thy sight (O Lord), so much he is, and no more:" which it would

<sup>1</sup> These words are usually found in the Latin copies of the 'De Imitatione,' though frequently omitted in the English translations.

not be hard to parallel, both in St. Bernard himself and in St. Augustine. It is useless, however, to contest a claim which is now altogether undefended. The mistake probably arose from its being imagined, by the copyist and printer, when really ignorant of the author's name, that St. Bernard was the only man capable of writing such a work in that age.

3. JOHANNES GERSEN, or GESEN, or GESSEN, or GERSEM (for in these several different ways is his name written), said to be an Abbot of Vercelli, is the next in order to be noticed. He is represented as a Benedictine monk of the thirteenth century. Sometimes he is spoken of as *Jean Gessen de Canabaco*, and sometimes as simply *Abbot John*. And in behalf of none of the other claimants who have been put forward in opposition to Thomas à Kempis, as the author of the '*De Imitatione*,' has there been such a persistent and vehement endeavour to establish a right to have his name attached to the book, than that of John Gersen. It will be necessary therefore to go more fully into the evidence which has been advanced to support his claim, to consider its worth, and how far any dependence can be placed upon it. The partisans of Gersen think that they have clearly proved that none but he is the real author of the book. As soon, therefore, as we have enumerated the other claimants, we shall proceed at once to examine the proofs upon which they ground his title to the authorship.

4. LUDOLPH OF SAXONY, the Carthusian, is another person put forward as the author of the '*De Imita-*



tion.' There is a manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' under his name, and it has been once printed as his. M. Velart intimates that he has in his possession an ancient *French* translation of the book, reprinted at *Antwerp* by Martin Sempereur, about the year 1530. It appears to be the work of a priest of the diocese of Metz, who rendered it into that language from a translation in the *German* tongue, not being able, after much pains, to procure the Latin original. In a short preface prefixed to the treatise, he tells us that this version in *German* was made by the pious Ludolph of Saxony, who, according to Menchen, flourished in 1330.<sup>1</sup> He wrote *The Life of Christ*, which was first printed at *Strasbourg*, A.D. 1483, where he had been the Prior of the Charter-house about a hundred and fifty years before. This work was digested out of the four Evangelists and some ecclesiastical writers, with commentaries and prayers to each chapter. This was held in special esteem by the *Canons-Regular* and friends of Thomas à Kempis, and possibly so much the more as he also was originally of the diocese of Cologne, where his manuscripts were preserved. And as the style of these two writers is somewhat alike, and the same persons that had a veneration for one had generally so for the other, their books on these accounts might be confounded and one taken for the other. And thus, say some, it is probable that *The Life of Christ*, which did really appertain to Ludolph, came to be printed under the name of à Kempis, as the 'De Imitatione' of à Kempis under that of Ludolph. Then

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xlii. p. 559.



is also an ancient French version of it found under this same name. The conformity, moreover, of style and of thought in the book of the 'De Imitatione,' with what is undoubtedly the work of this Ludolph, has been taken notice of by some. The authorities, however, to support this claim are but slender, and the conformity not greater than what may be elsewhere met with ; so that there is no need to pursue this case any further. It is probable that he was only the translator of the book, and his name was attached as such.

5. UBERTINUS DE CASALIS is also brought forward by the author of the *Conjectura*, printed at Rome, A.D. 1667. But it is not so much as pretended that this Ubertinus wrote all the four books, but only some of them. He lived in the beginning of the fourteenth century, and was the chief of those who were called "Spiritualists." He wrote a "rare and singular book" on *The Crucified Life* and another on *The Seven States of the Church*, both of which were printed at Venice. He was indeed, in his day, held in considerable esteem, being consulted by persons of the highest eminence in the Church. Moreover, his maxims seem to have been very similar to those of the 'De Imitatione.' A great deal of what the Benedictines bring forward in favour of Gersen will quite as well—if not better—agree with this of Ubertinus. He was, however, suspected of heresy, and accused of it by some of the Friars, both at the Council of *Vienna* and at *Rome*. And fearing, as it is said, the storm that was coming upon him, he chose to quit his Order, after leave had

been refused him to retire with his followers. Some of these protested against the Pope's usurped authority, and went even so far as to call him the Mystical Antichrist, or the forerunner of Antichrist. There is now nothing more than a *conjecture* still entertained that he might have composed a part of the 'De Imitatione.'

6. PETER RAINALEZZI of Corbario, a Dominican Friar, and Apostolic Penitentiary at Rome, is another individual who is said to have some claim to the authorship. He was a contemporary with Ubertinus, and had the reputation of great sanctity. There are one or two interesting details of his life recorded which may be briefly mentioned in passing. By the interest of Louis of Bavaria he was made Pope, under the name of Nicholas V., A.D. 1328, in opposition to John XXII., whom the Emperor had formally deposed. He was, however, afterwards deserted, and then betrayed by Count Boniface, and carried to Avignon. He there submitted himself, and lived, and died very penitent three years after. It was during this time that he is supposed, by the Roman Conjecturer, to have written the first three books of the 'De Imitatione.' As for the fourth book, he comes to the decision that it was undoubtedly written by Gerson, and that all four were afterwards compiled together, revised and digested by Thomas à Kempis, in that form in which they are at the present time to be found. When this Roman author, however, comes to cast up the evidence,—after having weighed the several reasons and authorities on each side,—he demurs a little which of these three

the better title,—Ubertin of Casali, Gersen of elli, or this Peter of Corbario, but is chiefly ed to the latter, for which he brings the testi- of one Marianus, a Florentine, whom he con- to have flourished near the beginning of the nth century. But his arguments are refuted by Papebrochius, who shows that Marianus was a red years later.<sup>1</sup>

. POPE INNOCENT III. is the next we must name. e he was Pope, he indeed wrote three books on *Contempt of the World*, which may have been a by some for the first three books of the 'De itione,' which are found also under that very title. individual was raised to the Papacy in the year

And it may be interesting to notice in passing, he was the Pope who confirmed the election of ben Langton as Archbishop of Canterbury, who the kingdom of England under an interdict, and e King John to sue for submission, which led to latter resigning his territories to Rome, and ving them back again from the Pope as a Papal The cruel persecutions of the Albigenses in the of France are stains also upon his Pontificate. this it must be confessed must at once put him d the category of claimants to the authorship of 'De Imitatione;' for no one who could urge and the extirpation of those whom he regarded as ual rebels with fire and sword, as well as dis- tenance the laity from reading the Holy Scriptures, have composed the book. It must be admitted,

<sup>1</sup> *Chron. Hist. ad Calak. Pontif.*, Par. ii. p. 82.

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however, that he enforced purity of morals upon the Clergy, and was himself irreproachable in private life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There is a manuscript Codex in the Library of the British Museum (Reg. 8, c. vii.), which contains only the first book of the 'De Imitatione,' having the 25th Chapter somewhat imperfect. The number of this in the Codex is 19. The one previous to this is a manuscript entitled, *Innocentii III. Papae, De Contemptu Mundi, Libri 3*, which is the substance of one of the titles to the 'De Imitatione.' And what is singular is that it is continued on the same page with the above-named first book of the 'De Imitatione,' and even on part of a line with it. But it is to be observed, that though the title might mislead some persons, the matter of Pope Innocent's work is very differently handled from that of the 'De Imitatione.'

## CHAPTER IX.

*Other Individuals to whom the De Imitatione has  
been assigned.*

JOHN DE CANABACO is another whose claim is founded upon a manuscript without date, which is supposed to be as old as Thomas à Kempis' time, which Cardinal Biscia brought out of many to Rome, and, with other writings, contained four books of the 'De Imitatione,' under the name of this John de Canabaco; for the title runs thus, *Incipit Tractatus Johannis de Canabaco, de Imitatione Christi, et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi, et dividitur in quartuor Libros*, i.e. "Here begins the Treatise by John de Canabaco on the Imitation of Christ, and of the contempt of all the vanities of the world, which is divided into four books." In the same manuscript there is a Bull dated at Avignon in the year 1448, and written in the same hand as that of the 'De Imitatione,' which proves it to be an ancient copy.

There are sundry opinions of critics as to who this Canabaco should be; but it seems most probable that John was really no other than Johannes de

Tambaco or Tanabaco,—for the more soft pronunciation after the Italian manner at Rome would modify the sound. He was Rector of the University of Prague, and in A.D. 1366 Master of the Palace of Urban v. He is then a real and no imaginary person. Indeed, the Gersenists, looking about for some basis on which to ground the very existence of Gersen, have tacked Canabaco to his name, as the place of his birth, after this manner, “Joannes Gersen de Canabaco.” But put Gersen out, and you have this individual, John de Canabaco. Besides the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ which is attributed to him, he wrote a work called *The Consolation of Divinity*, or *The Mirror of Wisdom*, published A.D. 1389. Mention is made of this book by Thomas à Kempis in his lives, as being in possession of one of the brethren of his Monastery. He wrote also *A Treatise concerning Nature and Grace*, and *The Delights of Paradise*, with some Sermons. Nor are there any manuscripts—after search has been made in all the libraries of Europe—which can pretend to a greater antiquity than what may pretty well agree with this age. He died in the fifteenth century, aged above fourscore. He was a person eminent for piety, and a diligent reader of God’s Word; a zealous and powerful preacher, and one that reformed divers abuses of that corrupt Court, in which he for some time lived. In his sermons and writings the seeds of a most necessary reformation, according to the life of Christ and His Apostles, were sown by him in the University of Prague. Here Dr. Leiderdam, who was as a true father-in-God to Thomas à Kempis when a young man,—



studied; and he might very well, when there, have received the said treatise immediately from the hands of Dr. Van Tambach (De Tambaco, or Canabaco), if he were the author, and might bring it with him to Deventer: and thence Thomas à Kempis could have easily obtained it, and so might transcribe it for the use of the Society, or for his own edification. But there is no proof of this, nor the least intimation of it to be found. Moreover the claim is unsupported.

9. JEAN CHARLIAR DE GERSON, the famous Chancellor of the University of Paris, a contemporary for some years of Thomas à Kempis, has had many partisans who have warmly espoused his cause as the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' He was born in the year 1363, about sixteen years before Thomas à Kempis, and, attaining to great eminence, was called *Doctor Christianissimus*. Though he lived in dark and troublous days, and took a prominent part in the disputes and contentions of the times, he was distinguished for his learning and piety, and is particularly remembered for his courageous defence of the Council of Constance against the usurpations of the Pope. We need not, however, here enter into any further particulars, as we shall have to recur shortly to the arguments brought forward in his defence.

10. JOHN A KEMPIS, the elder brother of Thomas à Kempis, is also supposed by some to be the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' He was Prior and Abbot successively of three or four monasteries or religious houses, and is, by an easy mistake, supposed to be called "John the Abbot." In favour of him, it is said

that the author of the 'De Imitatione' must have lived in that time when the apostolic manner of life was renewed by divers Congregations or Fraternities lately established; that he must have been a Canon-Regular, or "Devotee," not properly a monk; that mention is made by some writers of an elder à Kempis—the disciple (not of Dr. Florentius, but) of Gerard—who instituted these societies for the renovation of the apostolical life and fervour; that he was famous about the year 1410, while his brother did not become so until twenty or thirty years afterwards; that the most ancient manuscripts, dated from 1421 to 1441, conclude as much for him as for Gerson or Gersen; that the Senior Brethren who reported to Trithemius that their seniors who had read this book did generally ascribe the same to the elder à Kempis. All these points which are stated seem to agree with none so well as with the elder of these brethren. Moreover there is also extant in the Bodleian Library an ancient manuscript containing all the four books of the 'De Imitatione' complete, which has the name of *Johannes à Kempis* on the first page. Some have thought that the John named in the Arone manuscript of the 'De Imitatione,' which is very ancient, and accounted by some to be the most ancient, does most properly belong to John à Kempis; for the not ungrounded suspicions concerning the interpolations of the author's name and quality, with the easy derivation from the original, seem to make for this John, or Gerson of Paris; and if the title of the latter cannot be supported, for the reasons hereafter to be alleged, there is none of all the

*Johns* for whom a better plea can be brought forward than *John à Kempis*, or even so good. Nevertheless, when we come to revert to the evidence in favour of his brother *Thomas*, it will then be seen, on good authority, why he should not be esteemed as the author of the '*De Imitatione Christi*.'

11. The name of *WALTER HILTON* is the last we shall mention as put into competition with that of *Thomas à Kempis* for the authorship of the '*De Imitatione*.' He was an Englishman, a Carthusian monk of the monastery of *Sheen*,<sup>1</sup> eminent for his exemplary piety, and a doctor of divinity, who lived in the Charter-House founded by King *Henry v.*, and flourished in the reign of his successor King *Henry vi.* His name is not even mentioned by foreign advocates, as might be expected, but, as he was celebrated for his learning and devotion in general, so was he particularly regarded for his constant endeavours after the contemplative life, and his high advancement in it. Besides *The Scale of Christian Perfection*,—deservedly valued by experienced judges,—he wrote a book of *Spiritual Ascensions*, another of *Consolation in Temptation*, one upon *Holy Living*, one upon *The Idol of the Heart, or Spiritual Idolatry*, two upon *Contemplation*, with several other works which have not yet been published, but lie buried up and down in libraries.<sup>2</sup> His style is plain, after the manner of the '*De Imitatione*,'

<sup>1</sup> According to *Pitta* he was of "*Syon Monaster*." *Tanner*, however, has *Sheen* and he is probably right, as the former was founded by *Celestine* monks. See *Ames*, *Typographical Antiquities*, i. 121.

<sup>2</sup> A list of his writings will be found, together with a further account of him, in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1814, vol. lxxxv. p. 220.

without any affectation or flourish, whilst at the same time his thoughts are sententious and full of point.

The arguments in favour of Walter Hilton may be fitly introduced by portions of a letter—for it is needless to quote the whole—written by one Charles Hutton to an unknown author, dated December 2, 1706. He says:—

“I shall not now longer defer acquainting you with the motives which induced me to say that more probable reasons might be produced to incline any unbiassed person to suppose that most eminently devout and learned Carthusian Friar (our countryman), Walter Hilton, to have been the genuine author of that justly celebrated pious book, ‘*De Imitatione Christi*,’ which hath more generally been ascribed to Thomas à Kempis, than there is to suppose any one of those in whose behalf (in opposition to Thomas à Kempis) a claim thereto was in the last age set up; for there are irrefragable exceptions against the probability of the pretences made in their favour, as may appear in Dr. Cave’s *Historia Literaria*, and much more fully in several Tracts on that subject published by the famous Gabriel Naudæus, Father Fronteau, and divers other learned men.

“Nay, more colourable pretences may be alleged in behalf of Walter Hilton than have been produced in favour of Thomas à Kempis, whose justification to be the author of the book ‘*De Imitatione Christi*’ depends chiefly on the authority of a MS. thereof, in which it is not said that he is the author, but only *Finitus et Completus A.D. 1441 per manus Thomæ A. Kemp. in Monte S. Agnet. prope Zwoll*, which might have been asserted if he had only transcribed it. Now, it appears out of *Pitsius his Relationes Historiæ de Rebus Anglicis*, and from the authority of other authors, that Walter Hilton flourished before the date of that MS., for he was famous for his eminent piety and learning, A.D. 1433; and ’tis to be observed that the like strain of devotion with that in the book ‘*De Imitatione Christi*’ runs through his highly esteemed pious treatise, *Scala Christiana Perfectionis*, of which Walter Hilton is undoubtedly the author. . . .

"I must now observe to you, that at the time when was most hotly debated the long, and not yet determined controversy, betwixt the Canons-Regular, who stoutly did, and do stand up to maintain Thomas à Kempis (who had been of their fraternity, his title to the book '*De Imitatione Christi*,' and the Benedictine Monks, who pretend that there is extant an authentic MS. of that book, to which is annexed (as being author thereof), the name of an Abbot, who had been of their order, one *John Gersen* or *Gessen*, who flourished betwixt the years 1230 and 1245; and to justify their pretence, they caused—about the middle of the last century—that MS. to be brought from Italy to Paris; as likewise another (further to invalidate the claim of the Canons-Regular) which bore a date before the year 1400, without any author's name thereunto: which MS. was at the Abbey of the Benedictines at Paris exposed to public view, to be perused and examined by the most celebrated learned persons, and best judges of authentieness of ancient manuscripts; amongst whom Gabriel Naudaus, and several other learned men, famed for their knowledge therein, did declare that the title of the book now stiled '*De Imitatione Christi*' was in all the most ancient MSS. entitled '*De Musica Ecclesiastica*;' and the new title taken from the initial words thereof, *Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris*, is of a much later date. This gives me occasion to take notice to you, that Sebastian Castalio, in his translation of that book into elegant Latin, justly takes exception against that title as improper, and stiles his polite translation '*De Christo Imitando*.'

"I must further declare to you, that about the aforementioned time of the hot controversy between the Canons-Regular and the Benedictine Monks, Gabriel Naudaus, and divers other eminently learned men, did, in several tracts they then published on that subject, positively assert that the affixing of the name of *Joannes Gersen*, sive *de Gessen* to the MS., on the authority of which the Benedictines ground their claim, was an apparent forgery, as also was the date of all other MSS. before the year 1400 without any author's name inserted.

"I shall now only add, that some years ago, being in conversation with Mr. Obadiah Walker, he happened to cite an expression in his favourite book (as he termed it) '*De Imita-*



tionis Christi,' omitting the name of T. à Kempis, to whom 'tis most commonly ascribed, which occasioned a discourse about the eminent controversy, as to who was the genuine author thereof; and upon my remarking to him that Joan. Jac. Frisius in his Epitome of Gesner's Bibliotheca, and Joan Pitseus enumerating the works of Walter Hilton, made mention of a book composed by him, styled '*De Musica Ecclesiastica*,' and recites the first words thereof, *Qui sequitur me non ambulat, etc.*, which are the initial words of the book '*De Imitatione Christi*;' and inquiring of him whether he had ever taken any notice thereof in those authors, he not only told me he had, but did positively aver to me, that he had seen, perused, and compared the ms. of Walter Hilton *De Musica Ecclesiastica* with the book '*De Imitatione Christi*' most generally ascribed to Thomas à Kempis, and that throughout it exactly agreed therewith, abating some literary errata, and some few words and expressions which did not in the least vary the sense."

The unknown author then continues, "Here I shall add an extract of another letter, sent me from Oxford in answer to an inquiry of mine upon this head, by the occasion of the foregoing letter, viz. :—

"According to your order we have consulted Theod. Petreius; in his catalogue of the writings of Walt. Hilton he reckons this book *De Ecclesiastica Musica*, and cites for his authority *Possevinus* and *Simlerus*. We consulted the Titles of the Treatises of this letter contained in our Public Library, and finding nothing that promised any account of Hilton, we had recourse to Possevinus, who attributed *Musica Ecclesiastica* to Hilton. As for the mss., there are none either in Merton or Lincoln College, according to the printed catalogue. In Magdalen College we found one entitled *Musica Ecclesiastica*, the same with the book '*De Imitatione Christi*,' but ascribed to no particular author. The Bodleian Library has two manuscripts with the same Title of *Musica Ecclesiastica*: one containing only the first book of the "*De Imitat. Christi*," and no more. The other contains the whole book "*De Imitat.*" excepting the first chapter, with a little of the beginning of the



second, which are wanting, but the author is mentioned in neither of them. At the end of the more perfect of the two above-mentioned Bodleian manuscripts, there is this advertisement added in a Red Letter, but in the same character with the Black Letter of the manuscript, *Scriptus erat Liber ille anno Verbi incarnuti JESU Milless. Quadriginties. LXIX. et anno Incictiss. Principis et Domini nostri Domini Edwardi Dei Gratia Regis Angliæ et Franciæ, ac veri et indubitati Heredis Regum Castellæ et Legionum octavo, i.e.* "This book was written in the one Thousand four hundred and sixty-ninth year of the Incarnate Word Jesus, and in the 8th year of the most invincible Prince and our Lord, the Lord Edward, by the Grace of God King of England and France, and true and undoubted Heir of the Kings of Castile and Leon." From which it is evident, that it was copied under this Title while à Kempis was living; and none have yet been able to find that T. à Kempis ever put out a book under the title of *Musica Ecclesiastica* (or indeed any one else, besides our Walter Hilton), which begins with these words, *Qui sequitur me*. Wherefore if this were truly the ancient Title, according to what the three mentioned Manuscripts would persuade us, as also according to those others which Possevin, Simler, and Pitseus most probably refer to, as well as those that were examined by Naudæus bearing that inscription,—there is little doubt but that Hilton must have been the author, if not of the whole four books, at least of one of them. The Magdalen ms. is still more ancient, being dated November 29, 1433,<sup>1</sup> and was written by one of the first Recluses of that House in which Hilton lived. And now at this very time I have in my hands an exact transcript of a very old English Manuscript, which is mentioned in the Appendix to the Catalogue of the Bodleian mss., containing the first three

<sup>1</sup> Upon further inquiry it is ascertained that the date of this manuscript is not 1433, but 1438; but still, this date is of sufficient importance to be noticed, as being three years before the date of the copy of the 'De Imitatione' written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, viz., in 1441.

The 'De Imitatione' of the Magdalen manuscript is written by the hand of *M<sup>r</sup> Johannis Dygoun Reclusi Bethlehem de Schene*. In the same Codex appear several other religious pieces, and one of them (No. 18) is *Epistola M<sup>r</sup> Walteri Hilton de utilitate et prerogativis religionis et precipue ordinis Cantuariensis*, part of which appears to be written by the same hand as that of the 'De Imitatione.'

books of that divine treatise (but wanting that which we call the fourth), without any name,—or so much as ever mentioning it to be a Translation,—under this very Title *Musica Ecclesiastica*; the which would afford occasion for several reflections, which must not here be insisted on."

Upon turning to the Catalogue of Manuscripts at *Cambridge* we came upon the following account in vol. iii. p. 24 :—

An English Translation of the first three books of the treatise *De Imitatione Christi*.

A leaf is lost between ff. 62 and 63, and 68 and 69; and 16 between ff. 128 and 129, containing B. III. ch. 26—35.

The initial rubrick in f. 1 is—

"Here bigynneth the tretes called *Musica Ecclesiastica*."

Book i. begins (f. 1. a.)—

"Oure Lorde saith, he that foloweth me goith not in darkenesse. . . ."

Book iii. ends (f. 171 b.)—

"Defende and kepe the soule of thi lital servante amonge so many perils," etc.

After several other remarks and evidences in behalf of Walter Hilton, the unknown author thus concludes the matter: "Among all the competitors with our author (T. à Kempis) none has a fairer plea than our countryman, for whom there are some other arguments behind, which may not have been observed hitherto, that seem much to legitimate his title to the precedent volume, or good part thereof." It is probable that Walter Hilton had introduced the '*De Imitatione*,' for it was beginning to be well known in his day, and this might be the cause of its being attributed to him, since the author's name had not been put to the book. Notwithstanding, then, what has been advanced in

behalf of this individual, and of others, the anonymous writer whose words we have quoted still gives the preference to Thomas à Kempis as the author of the 'De Imitatione;' but he observes that as it was his method to publish his own treatises, either as anonymous, or else under the name of *Frater Peregrinus*, it has been so very difficult from hence to determine exactly which are his. And thus by his humility occasion was given for the intrigues of the contending parties, to the no small scandal of religion.

There was among the manuscripts of Archbishop Laud a very old impression, dated 1485, which had this subscription: *Explicit Lib. de Imit. Christi conscriptus a viro quodam Religioso, qui forte ob humilitatem suam noluit sibi ascribere hujusmodi librum per proprium nomen*, which well expresses the reason alluded to above, why there has been so much contention about the author's name, viz., his leaving this matter in some obscurity, not caring to be known.

In drawing this enumeration to a conclusion then, there appears before us a formidable array of competitors for the title to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' and some of them having no mean pretensions. We shall, however, in the following chapters, examine at length the evidences brought forward in behalf of those who have been most persistently set in opposition to Thomas à Kempis.

## CHAPTER X.

### *The Origin of the Controversy respecting Gersen of Vercelli.*

AFTER a long and searching controversy respecting the authorship of the 'De Imitatione,' which still survives with a persistency truly astonishing, it must be observed that the contention is now considered to rest mainly between three individuals,—Thomas à Kempis, John Gerson of Paris, and John Gersen of Vercelli. Several authors agree in this opinion. Mgr. Malon in his *Recherches* says, "One cannot cite more than three writers, whose cause has been defended with an appearance of reason; viz., Thomas à Kempis, Gersen, and Gerson."—chap. i. p. 1.

Hallam, in his *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, states, "Besides Thomas à Kempis, two candidates have been supported by their respective partisans, John Gerson, the famous Chancellor of the University of Paris, and John Gersen, whose name appears in one MS., and whom some contend to have been Abbot of a monastery at Vercelli in the thirteenth century, while others hold him as an imaginary being, except as a misnomer for Gerson. Several French writers plead for their illustrious countryman, and

especially M. Gence, one of the last who has revived the controversy ; while the German and Flemish writers, to whom the Sorbonne acceded, have always contended for Thomas à Kempis ; and Gersen has had the respectable support of Bellarmine, Mabillon, and most of the Benedictine Order.”—(Vol. i. p. 137.)

Dr. Farrar, also, in his sermon on the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ after alluding to the three, is even of opinion that the question lies only between Thomas à Kempis and another ; for he observes :—“ Of the nine or ten saints or doctors to whom at different times the work has been attributed, the pretensions of three alone can be now said to possess the least germ of probability. These three are a certain Gersen de Cabarius, Thomas Hemerken of Kempen, and Jean le Charlier de Gerson ; and the claims of the *first* of the three—a supposed Benedictine Abbot of Vercelli, in Italy, who is said to have lived in the earlier years of the thirteenth century, but whose very existence is problematical, and of whom at any rate we know nothing whatever beyond the syllables of his name,—those claims, founded on dubious manuscripts, confused orthography, and misread dates, may now be considered to be at rest.”

Here then, according to Dr. Farrar's account, the controversy is really only *between two individuals*,—Thomas à Kempis, and John Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris.

But can we thus summarily dismiss the claims of *John Gersen, the Abbot of Vercelli* ? Some consideration of the evidences brought forward in his behalf seems due to those who have advanced them, and who



contend very stoutly that he is the real author of the 'De Imitatione.' We ought at least to hear what they have to say, and give them an answer, whether favourable or otherwise. In a review of Mr. Benham's edition of 'The Imitation of Christ,' published by Macmillan, the writer of it in the *Guardian*, January 12, 1876, thinks that Mr. Benham has satisfactorily proved "John Gersen" to be the author. He quite reverses Dr. Farrar's decision, and, overthrowing altogether the claims of Thomas à Kempis and John Gerson, the Chancellor of the University of Paris, he deems that Mr. Benham establishes that of "John Gersen," the Abbot of Vercelli. The Reviewer says:—

"The Preface is of peculiar interest. Mr. Benham therein shows clearly that this famous book (the 'De Imitatione') could not have been written by Thomas Hemercker of Kempen, who was born about 1380, or by John Gerson, who was only seventeen years older, seeing that it was well known in the earlier part of the fourteenth century. A family diary kept by an Italian nobleman, De Advocatis, or Avogadro, from 1345 to 1349, speaks of a copy of the 'Imitatio Christi' as having been in his family for several generations. This is almost identified with our book by the remarkable discovery of a ms. copy in which are the names of several of the Avogadro family. The first printed copy, 1488, followed by De Sessa, 1501, ascribes it to 'Johannes Gersen,' whom a ms. note found by the Benedictine Cajétan in a copy belonging to an Abbey at Genoa explains to be John the Abbot of Vercelli. One ms. copy of the fourteenth century in the Colophon calls him 'the Abbot John Gersen.' Another of the fifteenth calls him John of Cavaglia, which is a village near Vercelli. In another he is represented as a Benedictine monk, where the Abbot of Vercelli was. There was an Abbot John there in 1225, the only one of the name in the list extant. The family of Gersen survives in Cavaglia to this day.

Thus far the Reviewer.



This is an allegation of so much importance that it cannot be overlooked, and indeed must be well searched into; for upon it turns the very hinge of the controversy; we need not, therefore, make any apology for giving a few brief abstracts from Benham's Preface to the 'De Imitatione,' so as fairly to see what is said by him in favour of Gersen of Vercelli, and by those who espouse his cause, and then boldly and critically consider the points of evidence set forth.

Mr. Benham says in the Preface, p. xii. :—

"In a family diary kept by Count Gustavus de Advocatis of Biella in the years 1345-1349, occurs the following passage (which is copied literally) under February 1349:—'15<sup>a</sup> Die Dominica mensis Februarj post divisionem factam cum fratre meo Vincentio qui Ceridonji abitat in signum fraterni amoris quod hoc temporalibus tantum impulsus negotis feci dono illi preciosum Codicem de Imitatione Christi, quod hoc ab agnatis meis longa manu teneo nam nonnulli antenates mei hujus jam recordarunt.'

"Here we have it stated that a copy of the *Imitatio Christi* has been for successive generations before 1349 in the possession of the family *De Advocatis*. If this work be identical with that before us, there is an end at once both of the Kempis and the Chancellor Gerson authorship. And we shall now show that there is a strong case in favour of the identity.

"In 1830, the Chevalier de Grégory, who had previously written a *Mémoire sur le véritable Auteur de l'Imitation*, made a remarkable confirmatory discovery. M. Techener, a bookseller in Paris, knowing his interest in the subject, showed him a MS. of the *Imitatio* of the thirteenth or fourteenth century which he had bought of an Italian. On the inside of the wooden binding M. de Grégory found the following autograph signatures:—

1550. 3 Maii. Ad usum Dom-Hieronymi de Advocatis,  
civis Yporedix (Ivrea).

Ad usum quoque Paracliti.

Ad usum Hieronymi, Federici Advocatis Ceridoni,  
scripsi, 1568 4 die Maii.

Ad usum Hieronymi Advocatis.

"This MS. was carefully examined by experts and its age attested, and the individuals mentioned were all traced and identified as members of the Avogadro family who had lived in or near Vercelli.

"We may now, I cannot but think," continues Benham, "take it as proved that this book was in existence in the thirteenth century. We have also the evidence above referred to that it was the work of John Gersen. Who was he? The edition of De Sessa, printed at Venice in 1501, has its heading like that of Koln, quoted above. But in S. Catherine's Abbey at Genoa, the Benedictine Cajetan (1560-1650) found a copy with this MS. note appended:—'*Hunc librum non compilavit Johannes Gersen, sed D. Johannes Abbas Vercellensis, ut habetur usque hodie propria manu scriptus in eadem abbacia*.' Here it seems to be implied that the author was not the Chancellor Gerson, but an 'Abbot John,' whose surname is not given. But this Abbot John was also surnamed Gersen, as appears from the *Codex Aronensis*, a MS. of the fourteenth century, discovered by the Jesuit Father Rosignoli three hundred years ago at Arona. It begins thus:—'*Incipunt capitula primi libri Abbatis Joannis Gersen de Imitatione Christi et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi*,' and ends thus:—'*Explicit liber quartus et ultimus Abbatis Joannis Gersen de Sacramento Altaris*.' Three other MSS. of the same century, and many of the fifteenth,—thirteen in all,—have the same beginning. Another of the fifteenth calls the writer 'Johannes de Canabaco' (Ital. Cavaglià), and another has a picture of the writer as a Benedictine, which we need hardly say the Chancellor Gerson was not, and the Abbot of Vercelli was. Taking all these circumstances into account, there seems strong reason for accepting the belief that the writer of the *Imitatio* was John Gersen, who is called John of Cavaglià, and that he was an Abbot of Vercelli. But when we seek to investigate further, it must be confessed that our ground becomes somewhat uncertain."

Now these abstracts from Mr. Benham's Preface show that something like a case can be made out for Gersen of Vercelli; and being desirous to get to the

bottom of the matter, and to learn all that could be said in his favour—for if the claim were honestly substantiated, and could stand the test of experts, we were prepared even to abandon the claims of Gerson of Paris and Thomas à Kempis,—we made an examination of M. de Grégory's work, of two octavo volumes, wholly in favour of Gersen, to the exclusion of the other two. It contains much matter, and seems to carry conviction with it. Many who read it, and have not heard the other side, will conclude at once that Gersen must be the author of the '*De Imitatione*;' and indeed those who have somewhat considered the claims of the other two will at first be no little staggered at the evidence so masterly set forth in the volumes. M. de Grégory gives us specimens of several MSS.—the *Advocatis Codex* and the *Arona* among others,—and the testimonies of several experts with regard to the antiquity of them, placing the dates of them before the time of either Gerson of Paris or Thomas à Kempis. He gives also a likeness of some one holding a cross in his hand, which he considers may in all probability be that of Abbot Gersen, as it is found in the manuscript, together with a short biography appended, giving the reader an idea of his being a real person, at least. M. de Grégory also argues that from certain doctrines, forms of worship, and matters of religious dispute, the '*De Imitatione*' belongs to an earlier period than Gerson or à Kempis, which, he says, makes it all the more likely to have been written by Gersen, and this is fortified by the opinions of certain learned men, whom he quotes.

Altogether he makes out a most plausible case for Gersen, and one that will lead those who do not care to look further into the matter to decide in his favour. As the most salient points of M. de Grégory's work have been quoted by us from Benham, there is no need to cite more. And it is only when the evidence comes to be sifted, and we hear what can be said by those who challenge the several points advanced, that we learn to estimate the new defence set up by M. de Grégory at its real worth. We shall therefore allude more particularly to this fresh evidence which has been adduced before we close the case, and show that after all that has been said, there is very little dependence to be placed in it.

M. Renan, the well-known French writer, we must also note, in his *Études Religieuses*, is much inclined to favour the pretensions made for this Abbot John Gersen, and labours hard to undermine the claims put forth in behalf of Jean Gerson of Paris. Dr. Farrar, however, in a footnote to his discourse, deals with his arguments and assertions in a very trenchant manner, by observing that "the arguments of Renan for the Abbot of Vercelli are utterly fantastic. The claims of the Avogadro ms. are now generally abandoned, and its date is probably 1549, not 1349. As against Gerson, Renan's arguments are extremely superficial, and are founded, apparently, on a total ignorance of Gerson's devotional and non-polemic writings, e.g. the *De Morte Contemplationis*, *De Paupertate Spirituali*, *De Parvulis ad Christum trahendis*, etc."

There is doubtless some ground for dealing thus

summarily with a portion of Renan's assertions; for those who have paid any attention to the controversy respecting the claim of Gersen of Vercelli to be the author, and considered more particularly the origin and history of it, must feel, to say the least, how very dubious his title to it is.

The cause of the Gersenists—upon which we now enter—may conveniently be divided into two parts: the earlier and later controversies. The old arguments have been burnished up anew by M. de Grégory, and put as it were into a fresh setting; and the fresh evidence from newly found manuscripts he brings forward to support the old assumptions, and, if possible, to clinch the claims of Gersen as incontestably established.

It may be well, however, in the first place, to give a brief review of the origin and history of this controversy with the Gersenists, as it will serve to throw some little light upon the subject.

It was not until the beginning of the seventeenth century—about one hundred and eighty years after the 'De Imitatione' had certainly been written—that vague doubts as to the rights of Thomas à Kempis began to be spread abroad for the first time, in Italy and Spain. They arose in this way. In 1604 there appeared a book in Spanish entitled *A Preparation for the Administration of the Sacrament of Penance*, and printed at Milan.<sup>1</sup> In it there was an observation that the *Conférences aux Toulousains*, attributed to St.

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Plena ac Succinta*, p. 27. The Spanish title of the book is *Apparato para administrar el Sacramento de la Penitencia*, etc. D. C. Cajetan speaks of D. Pedro Manriquez of Spain as the author, but Amort thinks he is wrong, and assures us that it was composed by P. Creswell, an Englishman, or by P. Guillaume Battens, an Irishman.



Bonaventura, include many extensive quotations from the book of the 'De Imitatione.' As this revered doctor died in 1273, more than a century before the birth of Thomas à Kempis, one can no longer, supposing the *Conférences* authentic, recognise the latter writer as the true author of the celebrated book in question.

It is now, however, proved that the *Conférences aux Toulouscains* have been compiled by an author subsequent to St. Bonaventura. The advocates of Thomas à Kempis and Gerson of Paris have shown that a work of Ubertinus is also quoted in these said *Conférences*; and as Ubertinus did not flourish till about A.D. 1320, when Bonaventura had then been dead nearly fifty years, it is evident that the manuscript could not have been in existence at the time stated, and must have been compiled subsequently, since the man alluded to, whose words are cited therein, was not born, or at most could only have been a little child, when St. Bonaventura died. The date of the manuscript is false then, and must belong to another period, much later, so as to include the time when Ubertinus lived and flourished. This fact was not recognised at the time, and so the doubt, thus started, was spread abroad in Italy, and engaged the attention of the learned. Not long afterwards Rosignoli, a father of the Society of the Jesuits, discovered in the house of the Society at Arona, near to Milan, an ancient manuscript of the 'De Imitatione,' without date, with this title, *Incipiunt capitula primi libri Abbatis Johannis Gersen, de Imitatione Christi, et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi.* And at the end of the



fourth book is written, "*Explicit liber quartus et ultimus Abbatis Johannis Gersen de Sacramento Altaris.*"<sup>1</sup>

As this house had formerly belonged to the Order of the Benedictines, the father Rosignoli believed that he had found a volume of the ancient library of the Benedictines, which at once revealed to him the true author of the precious volume of the 'De Imitatione.' Proud of his supposed discovery, he hastened to communicate it to the fathers Possevin and Bellarmine, who, without examining his proofs, or contesting his conjectures, congratulated him on the success that he seemed to have obtained. They learnt later on that this manuscript had never belonged to the Benedictines of Arona, but had been brought there, more than a hundred years after the death of Thomas à Kempis, by one Majoli from his paternal home, when he entered the Society of the Jesuits at Arona. The declaration of Majoli, as given by A. R. P. Heserus, was written in 1617, and is as follows:—

"Ego Andreas Majolus Presbiter Societatis Jesu testificor me anno 1579, cum Genuâ profisciscerer Aronam ad domum probationis Societatis Jesu, ut in eam admitterer, detulisse mecum Codicem Manuscriptum de Imitatione Christi sub nomine Joannis Abbatis de Gessen, sive Gersen, quem in domo paterna reperi, nec scio unde venerit, eumque reliqui Aronæ in eadem domo, ubi conservatus est multos annos, et inde accepit nomen Aronensis Codicis à P. Bernardino Rosignolio et aliis, qui legerunt Aronæ; et ignorantes, quod ego illum attulerim, existimarunt ibidem ab antiquis monachis, qui illud monasterium inhabitant, esse relictum. In quorum fidem hoc meum testimonium mea manu subscripsi. Cremonæ die 28 Januarii 1617."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> M. de Grégoire, *Hist. du livre de l'Imitation*, ii. pp. 8, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Piena ac Succincta*, pp. 169, 170.

From this it is manifest that the supposition of P. Rosignoli was false, and that the manuscript had not belonged to the old Benedictine dwelling at Arona before the Jesuits came into their place.

In the meantime P. Rosweyde, a Belgian presbyter then at Antwerp, as soon as he knew of the statement of P. Rosignoli respecting the Arona manuscript, wrote to his Italian brethren to prove to them summarily that the rights of Thomas à Kempis were incontestable, and that the supposed discovery at Arona was of no value. His letter, written in 1615, however, arrived in Rome too late to prevent the beginning of a discussion which has lasted for more than two centuries and a half. So palpably groundless, however, were the statements found to be which would make one Gersen the author of the '*De Imitatione*,' that many learned men abandoned the new attempt; and had it not been for the insatiable and unreasonable zeal of one man, the controversy would, in all likelihood, never have been carried on, but have come to an end very speedily, leaving Thomas à Kempis in quiet possession of his rights.

The name of that one man was Constantine Cajétan, respecting whom we must give a few particulars before we pass on.

## CHAPTER XI.

*what means the Controversy respecting Gersen  
was continued.*

STANTINE CAJÉTAN was born in Syracuse in 1560. He became a Benedictine monk of the abbacy of Mount Cassin, then Abbot of Baronte, secretary to Pope Paul v. "He is chiefly celebrated," says a late writer, "for the almost insane passion which he evinced towards the Benedictine Order,"<sup>1</sup> claiming as Benedictines many famous men who were entirely unconnected with the Order. Such an opportunity of enriching the catalogue of the glories of his Order now seemed to present itself that he would not allow it to escape him. He was then in the midst of all the glories of the family of St. Benedict, and these doubts about Thomas à Kempis had been kept abroad by reason of the *Conférences*, and the discovery of P. Rosignoli in the Arone manuscript had brought to light.

For many years Cajétan had proclaimed as Benedictines most of the distinguished Saints and Bishops, authors whose acts and doings gave the least hold to conjectures. It was little matter to him to place St. Gregory among the disciples of St. Benedict;

<sup>1</sup> Dean Hook, *Ecclesiastical Biography*, vol. iii. p. 375.

he made Thomas Aquinas a Benedictine novice, and he boldly maintained that Ignatius Loyola had been formed by the monks of the Order. Cajétan carried his zeal in this matter to ridicule. It is related of him that having one day found in the Church of St. Sebastian at Rome an ancient monument which represented the blessed Virgin, placed between St. Mark and St. Marcellin, martyrs, he imagined that the Virgin Mary was St. Benedict, and that the two martyrs were St. Peter and St. Paul. Immediately he caused a change to be made in the monument; he altered the veil of the Virgin Mary into a Benedictine frock, and substituted for the armour with which the martyrs were clad the clothes and emblems of St. Peter and St. Paul, for the sole purpose of associating his venerated founder with the glory of the Apostles.<sup>1</sup>

Is it to be wondered at, that in such a condition of mind this Benedictine scholar should with great eagerness and joy seize upon the news that P. Rosignoli had discovered in an ancient Benedictine house a manuscript which attributed the book of the 'De Imitatione' to an Abbot named John Gesen or Gersen? This celebrated book was then, according to his view, the product of a Benedictine. The discovery was to enrich the glory of his Order; it mattered little what degree of probability there was in it, if it could only be turned to account; the prize was magnificent, dazzling! Without losing a moment Dom Cajétan procured the manuscript of Arona; he

<sup>1</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, pp. 8, 9. Baronius in his *Annales*, 494, n. 77 and 78, vol. viii. p. 584, alludes to this singular mania of D. Cajétan.

put it in the press, and published it at Rome in 1616, under this title, *Venerabilis viri Joannis Gessen, abbatis Ordinis S<sup>ti</sup> Benedicti, de Imitatione libri quatuor*, etc. The manuscript bears simply the names of Jean Gesen, Gessen, and Gersen : Dom Cajétan conferred on the author the title of "*Venerable*,"—he made him a *Benedictine Monk* also, according to his customary zeal ; he carried the fiction still further : without either proof or reason, he ventured to say that the manuscript was written by the hand even of the author,<sup>1</sup> or at least dictated by him. He further stated that Gessen belonged to a noble family of Milan, called Gessen or Gessate, a family whose house, near to the monastery of St. Peter, still bore the name of the revered author. And, in order that nothing might be wanting to this story, he assigned to this family a magnificent villa in the environs of Milan.

He could not have made out a more complete account, or more precise. But, alas ! such a fiction could not exist for long. Everybody soon learnt that Milan neither possessed a house, nor villa, nor family of the name of Gessen, and the romance vanished for the time. Dom Cajétan himself was rather ashamed of his rashness ; and in his second edition of 1618 he suppressed these fabulous details, but without returning to historical truth. For his first inventions he instituted new ones. He had in the meanwhile discovered a book of the '*De Imitatione*' printed at Venice in 1501. Upon this volume an unknown hand had traced this note, "*Hunc librum non compilavit Johannes*

<sup>1</sup> "*Gessen abbatis manu exaratum*," p. 15. Ed. 1616.

Gerson, sed D. Johannes abbas Vercellensis, ut habetur usque hodie propria manu scriptus in eadem abbazia."<sup>1</sup>

This was enough for Cajétan to create Gessen Abbot of Vercelli. From the moment when the Abbot John became Abbot of Vercelli, he acquired the right of citizenship in Italy. Dom Cajétan, without producing any document, affirmed that he was an Italian, *Gersen italicum*. He had hesitated at first on the name to give his hero; the first edition was printed under the name of *Gessen*,—the name of *Gersen* which is found at the end of the manuscript of Arona being only inserted in the preface in a changeable form. In the second edition the new author was positively baptised with the name of *Gersen*, which he has retained to this day.

Later still, the Abbot Jean became *Jean de Canabaco*,—thanks to a manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' which bears this name. Owing to a mistake he was afterwards created a Doctor in Common Law. For want of authentic works he is reckoned as the author of an anonymous book, entitled *De professione religiosorum*, published by Dom Pez.<sup>2</sup> The Gersenists

<sup>1</sup> Vide De Grégory, *Hist. du livre de l'imit.*, ii. p. 47. The edition of 1501 bears this epigraph, *De Imitatione Christi, libri IV., Joannis Gerson, Cancellarii Parisiensis*. The author of the manuscript, note well, understood that the Editor in the printed inscription meant *Gerson*, although he calls him *Gessen*: but he guarded himself from saying that the Abbot *Jean de Vercelli*, of whom he spoke, called himself *Gersen*. But this, of which he was ignorant, Dom Cajétan without doubt knew by inspiration!

<sup>2</sup> *Thémur, notices. Anecdotes*, i. p. 80. De Grégory, *Hist. du livre de l'imit.*, ii. p. 34. With the looseness which characterises them, the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis assert that Dom Pez has published a work of Gersen, which is quite false. In his note to the anonymous work, *De professione religiosorum*, Dom Pez asks if this book is not the work of Gersen? It is a conjecture thrown out at random. Some Gersenists have, however, taken it



boast of his learning; they name his disciples and his masters, and his last defender seriously demanded his canonisation.<sup>1</sup>

Here then we have the origin of this famous controversy, which produced so many volumes and worried so many scholars. If the monks of the Benedictine Order had laughed at D. Cajétan instead of treating his fables seriously, this controversy would never have existed. But the die was cast; they regarded the supposed discovery as good luck for the Order, and hence the weighty and conclusive arguments which Father Rosweyde produced in 1617 were considered as null and void. They encouraged D. Cajétan so much, that, already warlike in his nature, this writer persisted in his fabulous demonstrations, so that he endeavoured even to extend and confirm them in 1618 in the preface to his second edition.<sup>2</sup> He is opposed in 1621 by a new edition of the *Vindiciæ Kempenses* by F. Rosweyde, and in 1626 by a series of testimonies drawn from the best manuscripts in favour of Thomas à Kempis. But all these efforts could not stand against Dom Cajétan's invincible courage.

was demonstrated. Besides, there is no analogy or resemblance of thought or style between this anonymous work and the 'De Imitatione.'

M. Veratti, Professor at Modena, asks in his *Disquisitioni filologiche e critiche*, "but is it not possible that the indubitable works of Gersen may still be found?" Ah, well! but whilst waiting for them to be discovered, is it right, as a positive and historical question, to take into account future contingencies? I leave the learned writer, says Mgr. Malou, to judge of this. Vide *Recherches*, p. 12 n.

<sup>1</sup> M. de Gregory, *Hist. du livre de l'Imit.*, i. p. 301.

<sup>2</sup> *Domini Constantini Cajetani, pro Joanne Gersen, Abbate Vercellensi, librum De Imitatione Christi auctore, concertatio, priore editione auctor accersit apologetica ejusdem responsio, adversus Herib. Rosweydlum, S. J. Presb. 1618.*

He moved heaven and earth that he might cause his opinions to prevail. It was a signal victory for him to obtain permission, in 1638, from the congregation of the Index, to print the '*De Imitatione*' under the name of Gersen. His joy was still greater, when he saw that same year, D. Valgrave, an English Benedictine, take up boldly its defence, and attack its adversaries. But on the other hand he was much surprised to meet with instantly three formidable adversaries, in the persons of the Fathers Fronteau and Simon Verlin, Canons-Regular of St. Augustine, brethren of Thomas à Kempis, to whom was joined Thomas Carré, a director of the English monastery at Paris.

And now the contest became more general. Two powerful Orders, the Benedictines and the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine, believed their honour engaged in this quarrel, when Cardinal de Richelieu ordered a magnificent edition of the '*De Imitatione*' to be made at the royal printing-house of the Louvre. The two parties thought to take advantage of this publication. The Benedictines addressed to the Cardinal a humble petition that he would put the name of John Gersen to it, maintaining that they had four manuscripts of this book at *Rome* which bear his name. He granted them what they asked conditionally, that this should be well proved and averred by persons of probity and skill. Richelieu hereupon wrote to Cardinal *Bagni*, who caused the said manuscripts to be brought to him, and to be minutely examined in his presence. But the result was in no wise favourable to the Bene-

dictines.<sup>1</sup> In the meanwhile the Canons-Regular did their best in supporting the rights of Thomas à Kempis. Moreover, Charles Labbé being charged by Richelieu to discuss this grave question with them, took the unfortunate step of proposing a third candidate—the Chancellor Gerson of Paris. This could not be listened to, though more could be said in his behalf than for that of Gersen of Vercelli. The Cardinal having at last lost all hope of bringing the sides to agree, ordered the volume to be published *without the author's name*.<sup>2</sup> He wished by this measure to leave the question untouched; but they would not permit him to keep neutral. They found even in his silence a means to perpetuate the quarrel. D. Valgrave seriously maintained that the reserve of the Royal printing-house took from Thomas à Kempis the possession of the title. "*Thomas a possessione dejectus est*," he said, and Dom Cajétan, convinced of the same opinion, struck up a new song of victory.<sup>3</sup>

The noise of the contention resounded in Germany, when Thomas Mezler, a Benedictine of Zwifalten, lent to Gersen the weight of his authority; but he did not prevent the learned Philippe Chifflet from pronouncing in favour of Thomas à Kempis. And in the year 1647 Simon Werlin reappeared in the arena with his *Rosweydis redivivus*, which was the precursor of the severest contests in this war.

<sup>1</sup> G. de Boissy, *La Contestation touchant l'auteur de l'Imit. J. C.* 1652, pp. 143-173, where see full details, and a relation of this examination.

<sup>2</sup> This beautiful volume appeared in 1640.

<sup>3</sup> *Responso Apologetica*,—the title to the preface of the third edition of the

<sup>4</sup> *De Imitatione* published by D. Cajétan.

From the year 1649 to 1652 there was a general conflict. P. Fronteau opened fire by the publication of his *Thomas à Kempis Vindicatus*, an excellent *résumé* of the arguments up to that time produced. Dom Quatremaire, a Benedictine, answered him without delay by a long amplification of the arguments of D. Cajétan.<sup>1</sup> The famous De Launoy lent to the Benedictines the assistance of his negative arguments, which he developed in many books, not very interesting now. The question was very hot in France, when P. George Héser came from the depths of Germany to precipitate himself on the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis, armed with his *Dioptra Kempensis*, with his *Response* to the last attack of Cajétan, and with his *Præmonitio* to the Pseudo-Gersenists, drawn from the authentic works of Thomas.<sup>2</sup>

Dom Valgrave again revived the favourite idea of the Gersenists, and endeavoured to prove that the 'De Imitatione' was anterior to Thomas à Kempis. But P. Fronteau, armed with the arguments of P. P. Rosweyde and Héser, repulsed his attack without any loss. It was replied to the same year, 1650, by D. Quatremaire, and by M. de Launoy, without producing any new argument.

In 1651, P. Héser made a sensation by publishing a very curious *Lexicon* of the *Flemish Idioms* which were to be found in the book of the 'De Imitatione.'

<sup>1</sup> Joannes Gersen, Vercellensis, Ord. S. Bened. abbas, librorum de Imitt. Christi contra Th. à Kempis vindicatum J. Frontei, author assertus a D. Rob. Quatremaires, Cong. S. Mauri. Paris, 1649.

<sup>2</sup> Summula apparatus Constantini Cajétani abb. ad Joan Gersen testatum oppositi. Ingolst. 1650. Præmonitio nova adversus pseudo-Gersenistas, cum indice operum omnium Thomæ à Kemp. Ibid., reprinted in Paris, 1651.

Then followed a work on the *Witnesses* favourable to Thomas à Kempis, and a list of the writers who sustained his cause. At the same time appeared the able book entitled *Thomas à Kempis a se ipso restitutus*, by Thomas Carré, who, for the first time, presented to the public the remarkable parallels of thoughts and of expressions which are to be found in the incontestable works of Thomas à Kempis and in the book of the 'De Imitatione.'

A quarrel of some interest now occurred to interrupt these serious debates. Gabriel Naudé, a learned physician, who had frequently called upon D. Cajétan at Rome, accused this monk very sharply of having altered the manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' to support his cause. The French Benedictines, irritated by this proceeding, cruelly assaulted Naudé in their writings. The latter, irritated in his turn, presented a petition on the 17th August 1650 to the Parliament of Paris, for the purpose of having a seizure made of the writings of Dom Valgrave and of Dom Quatremaire, who had so maligned him. Parliament authorised the seizure, which accordingly took place.

Dom Roussel and Dom Quatremaire immediately laid before Parliament "the atrocious calumnies and scandalous injuries" which they alleged Naudé to have committed against Dom Cajétan and the whole Order of the Benedictines. This physician, ill advised, had dared to say that Dom Cajétan was *un homme rabougri*. The expression appeared infamous to the Benedictines. The etymology of the word was discussed; the French Academy had to interfere; and they declared that the



expression signified only *un homme contrefait*, i.e. "a man deformed." Then ensued bitter factions, recriminations, and personalities, which served greatly to increase the hatred of the strife. It was only after two years of procedures that Parliament, on the 12th of February 1652—ordering the exchanged injuries on both sides to be suppressed—gave up to the Benedictines their seized books, and, pronouncing its judgment upon the main question, *forbade* the printing of the 'De Imitatione' under the name of *Gersen*, and *permitted* the Canons-Regular to print it under the name of *Thomas à Kempis*.<sup>1</sup>

As Dom Cajétan took advantage of the silence of Cardinal Richelieu, which proved nothing in this literary controversy, so the Canons-Regular took advantage of the sentence of Parliament. This weakness was the more excusable, as they evidently had good right on their side. In the meanwhile, they did not abandon the solid arguments which their predecessors had aforetime produced.

During the procedures in Parliament the battle had not been interrupted. Naudé reproduced in a different form a part of the arguments of Carré. P. Raynaud proposed two new arguments in favour of Thomas à Kempis.<sup>2</sup> The first was drawn from the perfect resemblance of the book of the 'De Imitatione' with the writings of the members of the Congregation of Windesheim, to which Thomas belonged. The second was

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempenae*, p. 4. D. Thuillier gives the details of this law-suit in his *Hist. de la Contestation sur l'auteur de l'Imitat.* de J. C. Vale Gregory, *Hist. de l'Imit.*, ii. p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> *Argumenta duo nova*, etc. Naudé, Paris, 1651.



drawn from the employment of the words *Vita communis devoti* and *devotio*, which were not only very frequently used in the school of Gérard Groot and of Florentius Radewyn, but had at the same time acquired the signification of proper names. This resolute conduct of the defenders of Thomas à Kempis, joined to the weighty authority of Parliament, appeared to confound the Gersenists, who, after these blows, kept silence some twenty years.

They were beaten, but not convinced. The truce was consecrated to the search after manuscripts of the 'De Imitatione.' They looked about, says E. Amort, for some medicine to heal the severe wounds they had received. As it was impossible to prove the existence of Gersen by historical documents, the Benedictines feigned to despise this kind of proof. They maintained that the issue of the controversy depended henceforward upon the antiquity of the manuscript books which they could produce. This principle, which was only a '*ruse de guerre*,' was again fixed upon as a favourite study of the Order. The Benedictines devoted themselves to a most active search to discover the most ancient copies of the book of the 'De Imitatione;' all the libraries of the Order were explored with zeal; and the result was, that they gathered together a certain number of manuscripts; but for the most part they were without value; they were not able to discover a single one that decided the controversy in favour of Gersen.

The Benedictines wished, nevertheless, to reap part of the benefit of their labours; and, under the pretext

of refuting the calumnies of Naudé, who accused them of having falsified some manuscripts, they obtained in 1671 from Mgr. Harley, Archbishop of Paris, the permission to assemble in his presence the most distinguished learned men of the capital of France to decide in good faith whether the manuscripts cited in favour of Gersen *were altered or intact*. Thirteen manuscripts were displayed, when it was decided that the books had not been corrupted. Not one word was, however, said upon the main issue of the controversy.<sup>1</sup> Another meeting of the learned persons was called by the Benedictines in 1674 at St. Germain des Prés, when another manuscript, called the *Slusian*, after the name of its last proprietor, was displayed, when it was decided to be at least two hundred years old; that is, about the period of the death of Thomas à Kempis.

The Canons-Regular had been excluded from the assembly of the learned men gathered together at the residence of the Archbishop of Paris in 1671; and finding the Benedictines at work in the endeavour to undermine the rightful claims, as they considered, of Thomas à Kempis, they determined to convoke an assembly of their own, of the learned experts, to express their opinion upon the age and value of the manuscripts which bore the name of Thomas à Kempis. This assembly met in the Monastery of Ste. Geneviève in 1681.<sup>2</sup> Many manuscripts, both *with and without*

<sup>1</sup> Grégoire, *Hist. du livre de l'Imit.*, ii. 467; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> In this year, 1681, the Cure of St. James at Aix-la-Chapelle—Henry Brewer—published a life of Thomas à Kempis under this title, *Thomas à Kempis Biographia, in qua ipius natales, vita, mors, elevatio, epitaphium, scriptorum catalogus, Elogia, Controversia super lib. IV. de Imitatione Christi, etc., Vindiciae, etc.*, Col. Agrip.

dates, of great moment were examined; but nothing was decided. The Benedictines, to oppose assembly to assembly, again met in 1678 at St. Germain des Prés, when the learned men, who had already lent them their benevolent countenance, had laid before them, for examination, the manuscripts which Dom Mabillon had brought from Italy. The assembly, like all the others, was without any result.<sup>1</sup>

After so many contests and quarrels, the public appeared fatigued, and the interest in the question began to flag. The fight ceased for about half a century; but it was taken up again with renewed ardour, and on a new arena, in 1724.

It would be tedious for the reader to pursue the course of future strife, the many conflicts that again took place, and the various publications that teemed forth from the press. We shall therefore only note a few of the more important points, and some of the most celebrated publications which appeared relative to the authorship of the '*De Imitatione*' in the eighteenth century, and then pass on to consider the value of some of the arguments advanced in favour of Johannes Gersen.

In 1724, P. Erhard, a German Benedictine, published at Augsburg the text of the '*De Imitatione*,' accompanying it with a translation in Latin verse and a concordance of the subjects. According to the traditions of his Order, he attributed the book to Gersen. Then it was that the redoubtable champion of Thomas à Kempis—P. Eusebius Amort, a Canon-Regular of

<sup>1</sup> Grégoire, *Hist. de l'Imit.*, ii. pp. 64, 475.

Pollingen—entered the field. In 1725 he published his excellent *résumé* of the arguments which were urged in favour of Thomas à Kempis in the book entitled *Plena ac Succincta informatio de statu totius controversiæ, quæ de auctore libelli de Imitatione Christi inter Thomæ Kempensis Can. Reg. et Joannes Gersen, Ord. St. Bened. abbatis patronos jam a centum annis agitur*, etc. Three years after, in 1728, he developed his proofs in a valuable treatise, which he added to the complete works of his author, entitled *Scutum Kempense seu vindiciæ quatuor librorum de Imitatione Christi*, which was again published in two fine quarto volumes in 1759. P. Erhard made an attack upon these works in his *Polycrates Gersensis*, when P. E. Amort at once replied to him, in the same year, 1729, in his *Polycrates exautoratus*. Then there came a truce for thirty more years.

In 1762, owing to some further attacks that had been made against the rights of Thomas à Kempis, P. E. Amort brought forth a large volume of 350 pages, in quarto, of crushing weight against the adversary. It was printed at Augsburg, and entitled *Deductio Critica*. The war waged on, and in 1764 the indefatigable P. E. Amort published his last work in favour of Thomas à Kempis, the title of which runs thus, *Moralis certitudo pro ven. Thoma Kempensi, contra exceptiones novi Gersenistæ Ratisbonensis*, etc., in quarto. This volume, a copy of which is in the possession of the writer, is very curious, from the number of *fac-similes* of manuscripts—twenty-two in all—and such as were considered of most importance on both sides;

those in favour of Gersen as well as those in favour of Thomas à Kempis. P. E. Amort died shortly after the publication of this work, and with him the controversy expired for a long time.

We must not, however, omit to mention another important work which appeared in this century, written by P. Ghesquière in 1775, which contains a facsimile of the Kirchheim manuscript, and of the marginal note of this manuscript which attests the 'De Imitatione' to be the work of Thomas à Kempis, and that this mid copy was made in the year 1425 in the house of the Canons-Regular. The title of the book is, *Dissertation sur l'auteur du livre intitulé de l'Imitation de J. C.* Verceil et Paris, 1775.<sup>1</sup> Besides being the oldest-dated manuscript of the 'De Imitatione,' there is a singular story connected with it, which will be related when we come to the defence of Thomas à Kempis. The manuscript is now in the Bourgogne Library, Brussels, No. 15,137. A photograph engraving of part of it is given in this volume.

During the present century the war broke out again very fiercely, and a vast number of publications have appeared, to which we shall forbear alluding, except in so far as they shall arise in contesting the arguments put forth on both sides of the controversy. We close this chapter, however, with remarking, that notwithstanding the bitter contests upon the authorship of the 'De Imitatione,' there is in Germany an almost perfect agreement in favour of Thomas à Kempis, and with them the question appears settled.

<sup>1</sup> A copy of this work is also in the possession of the writer.



In *Holland* also there is a full belief that he is the true author of the book. None of the doubts raised in France and Italy had the least echo there : never did anybody take it seriously, when, in the middle of the seventeenth century, the report of the quarrel of the Benedictine fathers and the Canons-Regular arrived there, for they considered the contest as merely a piece of literary squabbling.

The school of Gérard Groot, of Florentius Radewyn, of the Brothers of Common Life, the monasteries of the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine, and the Congregation of Windesheim, were so well known in Holland, and the men that had been thereby formed were so mixed up with the affairs of importance at the end of the fourteenth century, and at the commencement of the fifteenth, in this country, that any doubt upon the matter was impossible. Those who re-read the documents of the period alluded to found everywhere the memorials of Institutions with which Thomas à Kempis was associated ; and a hundred witnesses attest to them that this writer owed to the book of the '*De Imitatione*' all his renown.

The following chapters will contain an examination of the evidences produced in favour of Gersen, and a rejection of his claim.



## CHAPTER XII.

*The Existence of Gersen not yet proved by his  
Advocates.*

OUR design is now to place before our readers the resources and arguments upon which the Gersenists mainly rest their cause, and which may seem to have a specious appearance ; and then to show the weakness and worthlessness of their defence, and to demonstrate the impossibility that the book of the 'De Imitatione' could ever have been written by Gersen.

The Gersenists have at the very outset a most serious obstacle to overcome, which the partisans of Jean Gerson and of Thomas à Kempis do not meet with in this controversy. They are obliged to prove that such a man as Gersen ever existed : for his name, his country, his qualities, his writings, are all as problematical as his rights to the honour of having composed the book of the 'De Imitatione.'

First, we shall endeavour to show that *the existence of Gersen has never yet been proved.*

The evidence hitherto set forth has the appearance of being quite imaginary, and without solidity. For nearly four hundred years, that is from the year

1240 when he is thought to have lived, until 1616, when Dom Cajétan drew him forth from oblivion, or rather from nothing, nobody in the world ever heard of him, nobody ever mentioned him, nobody ever quoted him, nobody ever knew of anything that he did. This is very strange when you come to think of it; that for so many centuries the author of this famous book should never be alluded to by the men of his period, by those in the succeeding period, by the famous writers or religious authors who were likely to have known about such an one, had he ever existed. The complete, deathlike silence shows that they knew not that he had lived.<sup>1</sup> The Benedictines, who had existed for many centuries, made no mention of any Jean Gersen as Abbot of Vercelli, in the annals of their order. Trithème, who at the command of his superiors explored all the libraries of the Benedictine Monasteries, and who met with a number of books less remarkable than the '*De Imitatione*,' far from attributing this book to Gersen, attributes it, on the contrary, to Thomas à Kempis, or to his brother, John à Kempis. This courageous explorer of literary depositories did not find in any part the least trace of the existence of Gersen, and no one after him was able to point out any such individual.

Since then no contemporary witnesses are to be found, nor any subsequent historians before the commencement of the controversy, who have known

<sup>1</sup> The name of *Gersen* in a few manuscripts was generally assumed to be that of *Gerson*, Chancellor of Paris, whose Christian name also was *John*, and who was also sometimes called *Gersen*, as the epitaph on his tomb at Lyons testifies. Vide Ghesquiere, *Dissert. sur l'auteur*, p. 73.

Gersen, we contend that the existence of this person is not proved.

The historians who speak of Gersen as a real being are modern, and do not quote any ancient documents to support their statements. The greater part even do not make mention of this writer, except from hearsay, or in a hypothetical manner. But before discussing their recital, let us hear in what terms M. de Grégory places this matter before the public, as he will be sure to do the best he can for his hero :—

"The existence of Gersen," says M. de Grégory, "is attested by the historians Jean-Baptiste Modena, born at Verceil in 1522, and Marc-Aurèle Cusano, born in 1599, who were canons of the Cathedral ; by Charles Bellini, by Aurelius Corbellini, historian of Verceil in 1625, by the Bishop Augustine de la Chiesa, born at Saluzzo in 1593 ; by P. André Rossotti, born at Mondovi in 1610 ; by the doctor Mulaterra, historian of Vercellais, born at Biella in 1735 ; by the president Chevalier Durandi, historian of Vercellais, born in 1736 ; by the first president Count Napione, in his Dissertations of 1809, 1811, and 1829. The family of Gersen lived near *Canabaco*, now *Cabaliaca* or Cavaglia in Italy, a village of Vercelli, and in a little hamlet called *Dei Campi*, where to this day even are found worthy husbandmen who bear the name of Jean Ghersen or Garson. This fact has been verified by the same historiographer, James Durandi, in 1798, assisted by the secretary of the parish of Cavaglia, Jean Boscono, who presented to him two ancient pictures of the brothers of the Society of St. Francis, where he certifies to have seen the names of several, and among them, *badly written*, of *Ghercen* or *Gersen*, and called by the people *Garun*. The same notary Boscono has made known to Durandi that he had found the name of Gersen in more ancient documents, and he declared at the same time, that, after a certain popular tradition, not only the Benedictine Jean Gersen was a native of Cavaglia, but that he was held to be venerable and blessed."

<sup>1</sup> Grégory, *Hist. du livre de l'Imit.*, ii, 14 and 107.

Count Napione also invokes the testimony of Durandi, who had examined the documents of the year 1014 relative to the monastery of the Benedictines at Canabaco, and who declared by writing that the Canon-regular Frova had assured him, in 1768, he had seen an ancient parchment which contained the names of the Abbots Benedictine of St. Stephen of Vercelli, and upon which they had read in the year 1247 the name of Jean Gersen.<sup>1</sup>

Now these assertions, so positively affirmed, are nearly all invented, says M. Malou, and there is not one of them that can be reasonably invoked to prove the existence of Gersen.<sup>2</sup>

Jean-Baptiste Modena said merely in his history of Vercelli, "*that if it be proved that a certain John Abbot of Vercelli had composed the 'Imitatione,' this writer must have belonged to the monastery of St. Stephen,*"<sup>3</sup> and not to that of St. Andrew. Is this a testimony in favour of the existence of Gersen?<sup>4</sup>

P. André Rossotti relies on the dissertations of Dom Cajétan and of Dom Quatremaire. What dependence can be placed upon his statement then? He is neither witness nor judge, but a party. If Marc-Aurèle Cusano, Aurelius Corbellini, Charles Bellini, and Doctor Mulattera had discovered any trace of the existence of Gersen, M. de Grégory would not have failed to bring forward their testimony, and to quote the documents upon which they rely. Since he does not do this, their authority is wholly worthless in this

<sup>1</sup> Gregory, *Hist. du liere de l'Imit.*, ii. 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Recherches*, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> Amort, *Moral Cert.*, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Syllabus scriptorum Pedemontii*, etc., and Rossotti, p. 329.

matter; and it is quite evident that M. de Grégory only produces here again recent opinions, instead of contemporary witnesses.

Augustin Della Chiesa has not mentioned Gersen in his catalogue of the illustrious men of the town of Vercelli, *published in 1614*, that is, just before Dom Cajétan had called Gersen into existence. It was not until 1648, *four years after Dom Cajétan had published his last conjectures*, that Della Chiesa counted Gersen among the writers of Piedmont. He had then so much confidence in the assertions of Dom Cajétan that he affirmed upon the witness of this author that the manuscript autograph of the 'De Imitatione' still existed in the Monastery of St. Stephen of Vercelli, *which had been razed to the ground a long time before the period when he wrote this*. After the replies of Naudé and of P. Fronteau, A. Della Chiesa omitted the name of Gersen in the editions of the *History of the Writers of Savoy*, published in 1657 and 1660,<sup>1</sup> which seems to imply that, after further examination, he believed the statements of Cajétan to be unworthy of credit.

The president Durandi died in 1817, and Count Napione has survived him.

These are the witnesses of the history of the thirteenth century! Of what age also are these pictures of the brotherhood, and these more ancient documents upon which the notary Boscono has seen displayed the name, *badly written*, of Gersen? If an individual of that name ever existed, how is he proved to be a monk,

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Moral. Cert.*, pp. 67, 69



abbot, author, or native of *Cavaglia*? If the popular tradition recognised by M. Boscono existed in 1768, that which we contest is that they must still prove that it went as far back as the thirteenth century, or at least that it was anterior to the contest of Dom Cajétan. If the historians of the sixteenth century were too recent to prove that Gersen was Abbot of Vercelli in 1247, the monuments of the year 1014 that they oppose to the Kempists are too ancient to establish this fact.

The Abbot Frova, who has seen the parchments of the Abbey of St. Stephen, was never able to attest by writing that he had seen the name of *Gersen* upon the catalogue of the abbey of this monastery, since he has certified to Amort that this catalogue did not exist.<sup>1</sup> Frova observed also to Amort that A. Della Chiesa did not make mention of any Abbot. From which he inferred that Chiesa had never known the pretended catalogue of St. Stephen.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, there is really no historical evidence that they can bring forward in favour of the existence of Gersen. After all the search that the Benedictines have made, and the number of years that have intervened to do this, they can but produce in support of this pretended person opinions and conjectures put forward recently by authors who, in this controversy, are but interested parties, and not witnesses in the true sense. The impossibility of proving the existence of Gersen by history then is quite settled.

(2.) Can they, however, in any wise prove it by the

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, p. 244, n.



subscriptions of the manuscripts they produce? This is a question that we must endeavour to solve.

The MANUSCRIPTS which the advocates of Gersen bring forward in support of his claim to the title, are—

*First*, the celebrated manuscript of ARONA. This bears the name of Gersen at full length. But we have before pointed out that the Gersenists are mistaken in supposing that this manuscript had belonged to the ancient house of the Benedictines that existed before the Jesuits took possession of it; for it had been brought there by one of the novices from his paternal home about a hundred years after the death of Thomas à Kempis. We have now a few further particulars to notice about this manuscript from which the claim for Gersen originally started, and upon which his partisans lay so much stress. In the last assembly of the learned men of Paris, called together in 1687 by the Benedictines at St. Germain des Prés—but from which the advocates of Thomas à Kempis were excluded—it was adjudged that the Arone manuscript had been written *a trecentis annis*. This the Gersenists seized upon as a triumph; as if the judgment meant that the Arone manuscript had been written three hundred years ago, or before the year 1387. And from this they argued that it could not have been written by Thomas à Kempis, who would then only be about eight years old, having been born in 1379, and that consequently it must have been written by John Gersen, whose name was prefixed to the Codex. They say then that the council of learned men settled the question in their favour. The council

consisted of twenty persons, among whom they enumerate Faure, de St. Beuve, Cousin, Ellies Dupin.

Now in their zeal to overthrow the claim of Thomas à Kempis, the Gersenists seem to overlook the fact that they are far from establishing any evidence in favour of Gersen from the supposed date of the manuscript. For, if it had been written three hundred years ago, there are about one hundred and fifty years wanting to bring it up to the time when Johannes Gersen is said by them to have flourished; and this puts altogether out of the question the fictitious representation of Cajétan that it had been written by the hand of this individual. But, says Father Amort, that council of learned men in Paris did not judge the Arone manuscript to have been written before 1387: and if it had, it would certainly have erred, as I shall here demonstrate. First, I shall show it thus: Ellies Dupin, one of the learned men forming the council, at which he confesses that he was present, wrote a dissertation in his *Bibliotheca Ecclesiastica*, in which he describes this controversy, and states that the book of the 'De Imitatione' was written by Joanne Gerson, the Chancellor of Paris, at the beginning of the fifteenth century. When therefore Dupin thinks that Gerson, who was born in 1363, was the author, how could he adjudge the Codex Aronem to be written before 1387 or 1371? And after referring to the deeds of that assembly of learned men, he concludes with these words, *Qualitas Abbatis S. Stephani Vercellensis Ordinis S. Benedicti, quæ tribuitur prætense Joanni Gersen, non innititur ullo fundamento, aut ullo testimonio fido digno.* How

then could that judgment to which Dupin subscribed favour the claim of Gersen?

Then again Dupin, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which was among the last of his works, writing concerning the authors of the fifteenth century, says in tom. iv., *Ultimò consideratio omnibus librum de Imitatione relinquendum et adscribendum esse Thomæ Kempensi.*<sup>1</sup> It is manifest, then, that those words, *a trecentis annis*, which were written by Dupin himself, could not mean that the Arone manuscript was written before the three hundred years, but that it had been penned some time *from*, or within, that number of years. If then Dupin, with the council of learned men assembled in 1687, say that the Codex Arone was written *a trecentis annis*, it is intelligible enough; for if you subtract, say 230 or 200—which is a good allowance within the 300—from 1687, the year in which the learned council gave their judgment, you get the year 1457, or 1487. This brings the manuscript well within the period when copies from the original manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' of Thomas à Kempis had been largely multiplied, whilst it entirely overthrows the idea that this manuscript had been written in the thirteenth century when John Gersen is reputed to have lived. Father Amort proves in another way that the learned men in the assembly of 1687 must have erred if they had judged the Arone manuscript to be fully three hundred years old. And he does it in this way. In the following century a general assembly of learned men—experts in the knowledge of ancient

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 15, 16.

writings—met at Milan in 1725, and took great pains in examining afresh this said Arone manuscript: several Germans also, having much experience in old manuscripts, did so likewise, and they all adjudged the above-named manuscript to belong to the fifteenth century, and was not older. An illustrious citizen of Milan, writing to his friend in Germany, thus gives an account of the matter:—

“Curavi, ut Aronam deferretur exemplar controversum (Codicis Aronensis) illudque subjeci Eruditorum oculis, quas in hac urbe nostra celebriores novimus. En! autem illorum iudicium in annexo folio fideliter expositum. Unanimes scilicet concensu post diligens examen pronunciant, exemplar prefatum ante annum 1400 minime fuisse conscriptum, etc. . . . Me commendo. Mediolani, 17 Julius 1726.”

These are the words that occur in the annexed folio:—

“Quod attinet ad Aronensis Codicis vetustatem, si spectes tum ipsissimam characteris formam, tum interpositas possum compendiaras contractiones verborum non videtur ante annum 1400, fuisse descriptus, etc.”<sup>1</sup>

The audacity of the Gersenists in upholding the antiquity of it is the more astonishing when it is remembered that before the trial held in the Court of Request before the Parliament of Paris in 1652 this Arone manuscript had been examined at Rome in 1645 by competent persons, and notifications made respecting it before the proper authorities, when the experts who saw it certified that it could not be more than one hundred and fifty years old, bringing the date up to about A.D. 1495, which was some seven years after it is said, upon dated evidence, to ha

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 16, 17.

been written by Thomas à Kempis. They further certified that this Arone manuscript contained more than eight hundred very considerable faults, of which this last was not the least, that the *Correcteur* had placed a remark at the end of the fourth book in these terms, *Nota quod undecim Rubricæ ultimi libri præcedentis sunt falsæ*, etc. G. de Boissy, who records this, remarks that the great number of faults which are made in the manuscript is a convincing proof that it was written by a very ignorant man, and one who did not understand Latin, who instead of writing Gerson, which he read in his exemplar, wrote sometimes Gesen, sometimes Gessen, and sometimes Gersen. Surely if it had been an autograph copy, as the Gersenists would make it, it would not be full of so many mistakes, and the author would certainly not have been so ignorant as not to know how to write his own name.<sup>1</sup>

We must now, however, briefly notice some of the other manuscripts put forward in support of Gersen.

The *second* is that of PARMA, terminating with this inscription: *Explicit liber quartus et ultimus sancti Johannis Gersen de Sacramento altaris.*<sup>2</sup>

The *third* is the manuscript from the ancient monastery of BOBBIO, in which are to be read, in the fourth book, these words, *Incipit liber Johannis Gersem, cum quanta reverentia et devotione, sacratissimum Dominicum Corpus et Sanguinem sit sumendum.*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La Contestation touchant l'Auteur de l'Imit. J. C.* Paris, 1652.

<sup>2</sup> In the Royal Library of Paris, No. 1558. See Gregory, *Hist.* ii. p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> No 1555 in the Royal Library of Paris. Grégory, ii. p. 36. Bobbio is a town in the cliffs of the Apennines, famous for the monastery of St. Columba, and founded by Theodolua, Queen of Lombardy.



The *fourth* is the manuscript of the monastery of PADOLIRONE, near Mantua, which bears this inscription: *Incipit liber Johannis Gersen primus, de contemptu mundi et de Imitatione Christi*. And at the end: *Explicit liber quartus Johannis Gersen, de sacramento altaris*.<sup>1</sup> This manuscript was first discovered to have been tampered with by R. P. Werlin in his book, *Vindiciæ Kempenses*, to which Cajétan could not make any reply, though he endeavoured to answer other heads in the same book.<sup>2</sup>

The *fifth* is the manuscript of SLUSIO; so named from a Roman lawyer who gave it to the Benedictines of Paris. This manuscript bears an epigraph like the preceding one: *Explicit liber quartus et ultimus Johannis Gersen de sacramento altaris*.<sup>3</sup>

The *sixth* is the manuscript of Allatius, called BISCIANUS from the name of its former owner. This

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scriptum Kempense*, p. 17; Grégory, *Hist.* ii. p. 38. This writer pretends that the Abbey of Padolirone was suppressed in 1414. He quotes in support of his opinion Lubin, *Notitia Abbatarum*, etc.; then he proves by the following inscription that the manuscript was given to the Abbey the same year 1414: *Iste liber est monachorum Congregationis Sanctæ Justine de observantia, deputatus monasterio S. Benedicti de Padolirone, signatus, Nos, 981, 414*. It is to me certain, says Mgr. Malou, that M. de Gregory has mistaken the figures of the number of the library of Padolirone for the figures of the year when the volume was given to the monastery. Mistakes of this kind are not rare with the estimable defender of Gersen. The manuscript of Padolirone includes the following epigraph:

*Magnum parva tenet virtutibus urna Johannem;  
Præclausum meritis, Gersen cognomine dictum;  
Parisiis sacre professor theologie,  
Claruit, ecclesie qui consiliarius, anno  
1429.*

See Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 258; *Moral. Cert.*, p. 30. In Boissy, *La Contestation*, the word "consiliarius" is written consularius (pour cancellarius), p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Boissy, *La Contestation touchant l'Auteur de l'Imit. J. C.*, p. 153.

<sup>3</sup> Grégory, *Hist.* ii. p. 40. It bears the No. 1558 in the Royal Library of Paris.



manuscript begins with these words: *Incipit tractatus Johannis de Canabaco de Imitatione Christi, et contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi.* Hence it is supposed that John Canabaco is the same person as John Gersen; because it is supposed also that John Gersen was born at Cavaglia, and because it is supposed also that Cavaglia is the same village as Canabacum; and further, because it is supposed that Gersen has also been called Canabaco from the name of his country.<sup>1</sup>

The seventh is the manuscript of CAVE, a Benedictine monastery of the kingdom of Naples. It does not bear the name of the author or the date. It has, however, been pressed into the service of Gersen in a very fanciful way. The copyist has painted a black monk in the letter Q, which commences the book—*Qui sequitur me*; and he has placed in the hands of this monk a cross, in order to make it coincide with the words of the 'De Imitatione,' *Vita boni monachi crux est.* The Gersenists suppose that this monk is the author of the book: they then suppose that this author is a Benedictine; and lastly they suppose that this Benedictine is Gersen.<sup>2</sup>

It has been, moreover, proved that this manuscript never belonged to the monastery of Cave, but that Cajétan had so named it to acquire for it some credit and authority. What we know is so much the more certain, because it proceeds from the confession of even a Benedictine, and a Benedictine who could not be ignorant of it, since it is the librarian of the monastery

<sup>1</sup> Gregory, *Hist.* ii. p. 40; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 43; Malou, *ibid.*

of Cave. M. Holstein, his friend, wished the librarian to tell him candidly his opinion concerning the manuscript of Cave. He replied (as a celebrated Advocate of the Court of Rome relates), *Videri sibi et multis aliis, UNUM HOC ESSE EX CAJÉTANI MENDACIIS, quandoquidem nec in indice recenti librorum omnium dicta Bibliothecæ, nec vetustioribus aliis omnibus, libri istius mentio usquam apparebat, etc.*<sup>1</sup> This shows us how the matter was regarded by those who had the best opportunity, at the time of the inquiry, for ascertaining the truth.

<sup>1</sup> Boissy, *La Contestation touchant l'Auteur de l'Imit. J. C.*, p. 163.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### *An Examination of the Manuscripts in favour of Gersen continued.*

THE eighth is the manuscript of ROME, entitled *Opuscula SS. Patrum*. This manuscript includes divers extracts, among which are to be found, *Ex libris Gersen, in cap. X. sec. 7. Non sis in celebrando nimis prolizus aut festinus.*<sup>1</sup>

The ninth is the manuscript of POLLINGEN<sup>2</sup> in Bavaria, which bears the date 1441, and this unfinished inscription, *De Imitatione Christi, a Johanne Gers., lib. IV.*

The tenth manuscript is that of SALZBURG, of the year 1464, with this inscription, *De Imitatione Christi, Johannis Gers.*

The eleventh is the manuscript of FLORENCE, of the year 1464 : *Incipit libellus devotus et utilis, compositus a Johanne Gersen, Cancellario Parisiensi de Imitatione Christi.*

The twelfth is the manuscript of VENICE, of the

<sup>1</sup> Gregory, *Hist.* ii. p. 39. The manuscript is in the Vatican Library under No. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Here was the monastery to which Eusebius Amort belonged.

year 1465, as shown by Gerbert ;<sup>1</sup> it bears upon the back, *Johan. Gersen de Imit. Christi.*

The *thirteenth* is another manuscript of FLORENCE, dated 1466, and is entitled *Incipit libellus devotus, compositus a D. Johanne Gersen, Cancellario Parisiensi, de Imitatione Christi.*<sup>2</sup>

The *fourteenth* is the manuscript of SCHYR, in which the name of Gersen has been effaced, but in a manner so that it may still be distinguished, according to what M. de Grégory says.<sup>3</sup>

The *fifteenth* is the manuscript of VERONA of the year 1467, which is entitled *Tractatus de Imit. Christi, magistri Johannis Gersen, Cancellarii Parisiensis.*<sup>4</sup>

The *sixteenth* is the manuscript of WOLFENBÜTTEL, of which the index includes these words, *Capitulum primum compilatum per Johannem Gersen, Cancellarium Parisiensem.*<sup>5</sup>

As a *seventeenth*, one may add the manuscript translated into Italian, of which Eusebius Amort gives us a facsimile in his *Moralis Certitudo*, among the engravings towards the end of the book. This manuscript M. de Grégory ranges among the printed editions. The translation commences with these words, *Incomincia lo libro composto da un servo di Dio chiamato Giovanni de Gersennis, della vita di Christo e del dispregio de tutte le vanità del mondo*, that is to

<sup>1</sup> De Grégory, *Hist.* ii. p. 44. M. Grégory assures us that this manuscript bears the name of Gersen, and the date 1464; but he is evidently wrong. Dom Gerbert says that he saw two manuscripts of the 'De Imitatione' in the library of the monastery of St. George, Venice; one with the name, but without the date 1465; the other without date, with the name of Gersen. *Iter Aleman*, p. 469.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 259.

<sup>3</sup> De Grégory, *Hist.* ii. p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Hist.* ii. p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, p. 30.

ay, "Here commences the book composed by the servant of God, called Jean de Gersennis, of the Life of Christ, and of the contempt of all the vanities of the world."<sup>1</sup>

And lastly may be cited *two editions printed*, with the name of Gersen, before the controversy began. The first was printed at Augsburg in 1488. It does not, however, bear the name of Gersen at full length, but abridged, in this manner, *Incipit liber primus Johannis Ger.* As, however, there is found in the same volume the work *De Meditatione Cordis* with the name of Gerson at full length, it is strange that M. de Grégoire should pretend that the particle *Ger.* should indicate another author, *Gersen*.

The second edition, made at Venice, is entitled *De Imitatione Christi, lib. IV., Johanni Gersen, cancellarii Parisiensis*. M. de Grégoire makes the remark that the editor Sessa was originally from *Vercellais*; this remark explains without doubt the mistake by which

<sup>1</sup> In the initial letter of this manuscript there is a figure of Christ bearing the cross, with the wounds on His hands, and behind Him appear two priests in their robes with uplifted hands and faces.

Although the manuscripts in the library of the British Museum do not figure in this controversy, there are three which directly bear upon it. The first, numbered 3216 (Harleian Lib.), has this inscription, *Incipit libellus et compendius a D. Johanne Gersen, Cancellario Parisiensi*, dated 1478.

The second, numbered 314 (Burney's Lib.), has this inscription, *Incipit Liber Devotus et utilis (sic) compendius A. Domini Joanne Gersen, Cancellario Parisiensi*.

The third, numbered 11,437, begins thus, *Cancellarius Parisiensis (sic)*. The manuscript has many abbreviations, and is difficult to read.

The other manuscripts are without a name; the above three, however, are decidedly more in favour of Gerson than Gersen, though the second syllable in two of them has the *e* instead of the *o*. In the second manuscript another mode also of spelling the name is to be observed. There are other manuscripts also in this country, as it will be seen, which gave the title to the German Chancellor.

he attributes the 'De Imitatione' to a Chancellor of Paris, instead of attributing it to a Benedictine of Verceil.

It is upon a copy of this edition, found in the library of St. Catharine at Genoa, that D. Cajétan observed the manuscript note which made Gersen an Abbot of Verceil. It was conceived in these words: *Hunc librum non compilavit Johannis Gerson, sed D. Johannes, abbas Vercellensis, ut habetur usque hodie propria manu scriptus in eadem abbacia.*

The editions subsequent to the year 1615 do not deserve any notice, since they were only made to propagate a contested opinion.

Let us now see if the inscriptions of these manuscripts and of these editions prove the existence of Gersen.

We must make two remarks : *first*, that the greater part of these manuscripts *do not bear any date* ; and *secondly*, that the dated manuscripts are subsequent to the first half of the fifteenth century, that is to say, subsequent to the time when the 'De Imitatione' was already spread abroad under the name of Thomas à Kempis.

The most ancient of the manuscripts *dated*, with the name of Gersen, is the manuscript of Parma, copied in 1464, nearly half a century after Thomas à Kempis is declared to have composed the book of the 'De Imitatione.' Moreover, as it can be shown, the partisans of Gersen have not been able to discover, even up to the present time, a single manuscript which by the confession of all the savans was anterior to the fifteenth



century. They do not know of any manuscript contemporary with Gersen; all are subsequent by two, or two and a half centuries to the time when he is thought to have lived, that is to say, all coincide with the time when Thomas à Kempis had already made the 'De Imitatione' public.

The manuscripts of the 'De Imitatione' which bear the name of Gersen are then a great deal too recent to afford testimony in this controversy.

Another observation must be made: the inscriptions of these manuscripts do not furnish historical proof. They belong entirely to copyists, who have composed them according to their fancy or preference. The variety of expressions that may be noticed in them shows plainly that they have not been reproduced from a first common type.

The copyists were often deceived, especially in the fifteenth century, in composing arbitrary inscriptions, which had only their origin in public rumour, an opinion, or a conjecture. We find manuscripts copied in this age which bear the name of St. Bernard, Ubertinus, Ludolph, Canabaco, and of others, with the names of Gerson, Gersen, and Thomas à Kempis. It is certain that the first names must have been added to the manuscripts by caprice, and it is impossible that the 'De Imitatione' could have been composed by all the three authors who contend for this book. The copyists are then found to have inserted these inscriptions in flagrant error and ignorance, which deprives their testimony of all historical value, when it is thus sifted.

Moreover, the greater part of the copyists who have attributed the 'De Imitatione' to Gersen never dreamt of a Benedictine abbot of Vercelli, but of Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris. Their inscriptions prove this. The manuscript of Padolirone, the two manuscripts of Florence—that of Verona, that of Wolfenbüttel—the edition of 1501, all attribute this book to *Gersen, Chancellor of Paris*. Who will dare to say that they designate under this name Jean Gersen de Canabaco, Abbot of Vercelli, and not Gerson? The other copyists who do not call Gersen *Chancellor of Paris* have most probably wished to indicate Gerson, whose name was sometimes turned into Gersen. This assertion is not merely a bold conjecture; it is founded on facts, as the following instances will prove:—

Montfaucon cites an edition of the 'De Imitatione,' given under the name of Thomas à Kempis, at Lyons, in 1489, which is followed by the treatise *De Meditatione Cordis*, which is written by Gerson, and printed under the name of *Gersen*.<sup>1</sup> Here are the titles, first, *Fratri Thomæ à Kempis, de Imitatione Christi liber*, Lugduni, 1489; and the following, *Johannis GERSEN De Meditatione Cordis*.

Further, we see the name of *Gersen* given to Gerson at Lyons, in the town where Gerson passed the last years of his life, where his person and his writings were perfectly well known, and where he had his tomb.

In the Strasburg edition of the complete works of

<sup>1</sup> *Biblioth. MSS.*, t. ii. p. 1197.

Gerson, dated 1483, this writer is called, at the head of the second volume, *Dominum Johannem de Gersenne*,<sup>1</sup>—a denomination which only differs from that of Gersen by a syllable adjoined, and which quite answers to the inscription of the Italian version quoted in favour of Gersen, which attributes the *De Imitatione* to *Jean de Gersennis*. This is sufficient to prove that the name of Gerson was at times transformed into that of Gersen.

The Gersenists, however, contend that the title of *abbot*, given to Gersen in certain manuscripts, does not suit Gerson, and say that here the copyists have not wished to designate the Chancellor of Paris. This appears to have some force. But it is said in reply, that the title of *abbot* was only given to Gersen in a single manuscript, that of Arona, and in the manuscript note of the edition of 1501. We may therefore consider this objection to be of little importance. The copyists, who have transformed at their own will the name of Gerson into that of Gersen, have been able in the same manner to add the title of *abbot* in one or two instances. And perhaps they may have alluded to the dignity of *abbot* '*commendataire*,' with which Gerson was invested. Considering the whole point, therefore, the authority of a single manuscript, or rather the inscription of a manuscript, is void of weight when it is compared with the authority of facts set against it.

The partisans of Gersen then turn against their adversaries the argument which has just been exposed ;

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 150.

for they pretend that the name of Gersen was transformed into that of Gerson, and that the error of the copyists had taken place to their detriment, because they changed the Benedictine abbot into a Chancellor of Paris.

This assertion cannot be sustained. It is evidently the dignity,—the attributes which designate the person.

Observe how the point is to be regarded. In calling Gersen Chancellor of Paris, Gerson is indicated, who was really Chancellor of Paris, just as it would indicate the Abbot of Vercelli, if Gerson had been called a Benedictine Abbot. Now, none of the manuscripts bear this title, *Johannis Gersonis, abbatis Ordinis sancte Benedicti*; whilst the manuscripts quoted in favour of Gersen have for the most part this inscription, *Johannis Gersen, Cancellarii Parisiensis*. It must be admitted, then, that Gerson is intended everywhere when the copyists speak of the Chancellor of Paris, although he may be called Gersen, Gessen, or de Gersennis; as it would be admitted, on the other hand, that Gersen is always intended when he is spoken of as Abbot Benedictine of Vercelli (if manuscripts with such an inscription exist), even were he called Gerson or Gersonne.

We may conclude then, as a thing well established and proved, that the name of Gerson has been frequently changed into that of Gersen, and that this alteration is the sole cause of the supposed existence of the pretended Abbot of Vercelli.

A few lines will now suffice to reduce to nothing

the authority of the manuscripts in support of Gersen.

The manuscript of Cave contains, as it has been already stated, in the initial letter Q, the figure of a monk habited in black, which the Gersenists assert to be a Benedictine monk. But there is nothing, we would observe, that especially indicates this, for several Orders, among which may be counted some Congregations of the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine, wore habits of this colour. It appears but as a figure of fancy added by the copyist—a figure which has no historical value. Eusebius Amort has seen an Italian manuscript of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ upon which was painted two monks in white habits, with this inscription, *Canonici Salvatorenses*.<sup>1</sup> The Canons-Regular of Windesheim wore white cassocks;<sup>2</sup> but the Benedictines have never worn them. If pictures of this kind had any historical value, the two miniatures, of which mention has just been made, would annul both one and the other. But if the manuscript of Cave is considered by itself, no advantage arises from it for the cause of Gersen; for even if it could be proved that the monk painted in the initial letter of the Cave manuscript was a Benedictine, the Gersenists would have still to prove that this Benedictine is Gersen, and that he has been represented as the author of the book.

The partisans of Gersen have not, moreover, the right to claim for their hero the manuscripts which bear the incomplete names of *Gers* and *Ges*, for these

<sup>1</sup> *Moral. Cert.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Vide Hélyot, *Hist. des Ord. Relig.*, ii. p. 354.



names or particles, as also the titles, belong to the Chancellor of Paris quite as much as to the supposed Abbot of Vercelli. In the doubt which exists, our preceding remarks upon the transformation of the name will certainly make the balance to preponderate in favour of Gerson.

Of the three printed editions for which M. de Grégory contends, there is not one of them that he can take advantage of. The first, printed at Augsburg in 1488, does not bear the name of Gersen, but that of *Jean Gers*, who is very probably Gerson, as we have just said. The edition of the 'De Imitatione' in Italian, upon which the name of the author is *Jean de Gersennis*, answers to the name *Jean de Gersenne*, given to Gerson by his editor at Strasburg in 1483. The edition of Venice, published in 1501, attributes the 'De Imitatione' to a Chancellor of Paris; that is to say, to Gerson. *There does not then exist any edition of the 'De Imitatione' under the name of the Abbot Gersen before the origin of the controversy.* Everywhere and always the documents that are produced in support of this Abbot resolve themselves into favourable arguments for Gerson, who has not any title to the honour of having composed the "De Imitatione," as we shall soon see. We think then that it has been satisfactorily shown that neither history, nor manuscripts, nor editions, furnish the least proof of the existence of Gersen, and that this good monk is quite in his right place, when he is put among imaginary beings.

There are a few general observations upon other



points of the defence made in behalf of Gersen, which should not be omitted, as they will contribute to show upon what a rotten foundation his claim to be the author of the '*De Imitatione*' rests, or rather, that there is no foundation at all for it.

And first, why should there be so much difficulty in giving this supposed Abbot of Vercelli a name? In the Arone manuscript, his name is written in three different ways, *Gesen*, *Gessen*, and *Gersen*. D. Cajétan at first adopts the first name, and then finally fixes upon the last. Since then, a fourth name has been discovered in the manuscript of Bobbio, and in that of Verona, viz., that of *Gersem*, not to mention *Jean de Gersennis*. And when M. de Grégory sees even the name of his hero *badly written* in the name of a family of honest labourers in the neighbourhood of Cavaglia, who call themselves *Garsen*, *Garson*, or *Garzoni*, it only shows what uncertainty there is about the very name, and how ready the Gersenists are to catch at a straw to strengthen their cause. These differences would be of little importance if the author were well known, and if all the names had been applied to a substantial being; but they suggest terrible doubts to the mind, when one thinks that they are applied to a man about whom every one is ignorant, and of whose very being nothing is really known. If these names had not been written, Gersen would not have existed, for these names differ one from the other. Gersen is then really dead before his birth!

Then the manuscript of Allatius, it must be observed, attributes the '*De Imitatione*' to *Jean de*

*Canabaco*, without saying whether he were abbot, or even a Benedictine. The Gersenists, however, seize upon the name, and affirm that this Jean de Canabaco is the same person as Gersen,—that it is another name that belongs to him. But this assertion is quite gratuitous. There is nothing in common between Gersen and Jean de Canabaco, except the personal pronoun Jean. Now there are too many *Johns* in the world for this pronoun to indicate the identity of these two beings. Who will venture to prove that the manuscript of Allatius does not disclose a new author who has as much title to the honour of having composed the ‘*De Imitatione*’ as St. Bernard or Ludolph?

Then again, the Gersenists intimate that Canabaco is the name of the place where Gersen was born, and he must therefore be an Italian; but then no such place as Canabaco is to be found in Italy; and then they say that Canabaco signifies Cavaglia.

Now, as they cannot prove that Jean de Canabaco is the same person as Jean Gersen, neither can they prove that Canabaco is the same as Cavaglia, for this borough was formerly called *Cabaliacum*, a name very different from that found in the manuscript of Allatius. This difference, however, does not embarrass them. It is an error of the copyists, say they, that is all. The Gersenists are unfortunate. Their last resource is always either an ancient memorandum, a torn leaf, or a mistake of the copyist!

It cannot, however, be admitted that the word *Cabaliacum* has been changed into that of *Canabacum* by the fault of the copyist, who would have made a

quadruple substitution of letters. It is then a new conjecture that is ventured upon, and which does not rest on any solid foundation. Besides, Amort has proved that Germany possessed a family of the name of *Canabacum*, and he supposes that the title of the manuscript of Allatius, which has been brought from Germany, indicates the proprietor, and not the author, of the copy which bears this name.

Another point to be noticed is this, that the dignity of Abbot which they give to Gersen is but little better sustained. A single manuscript—that of Arona, as we have already stated—gives this title to him. The manuscript note discovered by Cajétan upon the printed edition of 1501 confirms the testimony of the manuscript; that is all. There is, nevertheless, this difference between the two, that the manuscript makes Gersen Abbot *in partibus*, whilst the note assigns to him the Abbey of Vercelli. It is here that the perplexity commences.

The town of Vercelli has possessed two abbeys: one of St. Andrew, which *belonged to the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine* since the year 1224, when it was founded, until the year when it was suppressed; the other of St. Stephen, which belonged to the Benedictines, and was destroyed in 1581. The Gersenists have never been able to agree about the choice of these two abbeys. Valart pronounced for St. Andrew; many others preferred St. Stephen; M. de Grégory, more accommodating than his predecessors, leaves the choice to the reader,<sup>1</sup>—a course familiar to him. It is, how-

<sup>1</sup> *Hist.*, ii. p. 157.

ever, certainly a curious method whereby to enlighten and decide critical questions!

Whichever way it be, no matter; the adversaries of Gersen have proved, in the first instance, that the monastery of St. Andrew belonged to the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine at the time when Gersen is said to have lived, and that consequently no Benedictine monk could then exercise the functions of abbot. They have then published the complete catalogue of the abbots of this monastery in the thirteenth century, and shown that neither the name of Jean nor that of Gersen figure there.<sup>1</sup>

But then, Gersen may have been abbot of St. Stephen. The Abbot Frova, interrogated by Eusebius Amort on this point, replied in 1762 that the catalogue of the abbots did not exist: he added, that by his own researches he had succeeded in discovering in the archives of the town the names of the following abbots:—

ROBALD, abbot from 1206 to 1219.

PETER, abbot in 1243.

WILLIAM *de Advocatis*, abbot 1320 to 1340.

He did not discover any abbot of St. Stephen of the name of *Jean* before the year 1491.<sup>2</sup>

Thus no catalogue of the abbots exists; and among the isolated names no Gersen or Jean; and in the year 1243, when Jean Gersen is thought to have been abbot of this monastery, one named Peter governed it.

So entirely without foundation does the claim for Gersen appear, and even the existence of any such

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, p. 72.

person, that it seems needless to pursue the question further; so complete was the overthrow of the Gersenists in the earlier controversies that took place, that we might imagine the question had been set at rest for ever. But it is not so: notwithstanding every prop has been knocked down, an attempt has been made in the present century to set up a new defence in favour of Gersen. And to the consideration of this we must address ourselves in another chapter.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### *The new Defence for Gersen by M. de Grégory.*

THE new system of demonstration in favour of the pretended Benedictine Abbot of Vercelli, as constructed by M. de Grégory, has been already set forth, in the reasons which Mr. Benham gives, for even at this day deciding in favour of Gersen as the author of the 'De Imitatione,' and by his Reviewer, in the *Guardian* for the year 1876, pronouncing that he has satisfactorily proved the matter.

Before proceeding to an examination of this fresh theory, which forms the later controversy respecting Gersen, it should be mentioned that even M. Renan—a supporter of the cause of Gersen—in his *Études d'Histoire Religieuse*, is very severe upon M. de Grégory, and intimates that he has done hurt to his cause by the bad reasons and digressions which he has adopted. "One can only regret," he adds, "that this last defender of the Vercelli pretensions had not known better than his predecessors in advocating the cause, to place himself above the habitual method of the Italian critics. For this national vanity, so out of place in literary history, will inspire the reader with a sort of



defiance against the best proofs and the most decisive reasons adduced." Well would it have been if those who lately espoused the cause of Gersen in this country had noticed this criticism, or had been better acquainted with the earlier controversies respecting his claim, for surely it would have made them hesitate before writing so positively in his favour.

Now, in addition to what has been stated by Mr. Benham respecting the new discoveries, as previously named, it is remarked, that until the year 1830, M. de Grégory had gone upon the traces of the ancient Gersenists; when in this year he discovered a new manuscript of the book of the 'De Imitatione' in the shop of the bookseller Techener, of which he possessed himself, and upon which he founded his fresh defence in favour of his hero. Inside this volume he found the names of the ancient possessors of it—as will be seen in the account already given in Mr. Benham's recital—together with notices of certain events relating to the family in the sixteenth century. This ancient family, called in Italian Avogadra, still existed at Bielle near Vercelli, where it was held in repute. M. de Grégory in his *Histoire des Lettres et des Arts* of Vercelli, had already pointed out several members of this family, who were distinguished in the middle ages;<sup>1</sup> but the moment he comes into possession of this manuscript *De Advocatis* he is anxious to enter into actual communication with the De Avogadri, to discover the origin of the volume.

What they related had for him, according to his

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. du liv. de l'Imit.*, ii. pp. 233, 234.

account, a result as astonishing as it was unlooked for. The family of the *De Avogadri* possessed, moreover, a kind of journal of the fourteenth century, where different events, relative to its members, were narrated. They discovered there, at the date of the year 1349, an express mention of the book of the 'De Imitatione.' And when the reader refers to the extract of the journal already given, he should notice, that it was not the finding of the *Diarium* or journal of the Avogadri family, which is first alluded to, that led to the discovery of the copy of the 'De Imitatione,' but the finding of the latter, which gave some clew to hearing about the *Diarium*.

Upon these two manuscripts, then, M. de Grégory founds a triple argument in favour of Gersen.

1. He pretends at the outset that this manuscript of the 'De Imitatione,' which he bought in Paris, both from its form and character, belongs to the end of the thirteenth century, or to the commencement of the fourteenth, and thus he makes it to approach the age of Gersen.

2. He then advances the idea that a material connection exists between his manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' and the *Diarium*. According to him, the copy of the 'De Imitatione' which was bequeathed in 1349 to Vincent de Avogadri, is precisely that which he bought in Paris in 1830.

3. Lastly, he wishes to establish the authenticity of the *Diarium*: from which it will follow that the book of the 'De Imitatione' existed before the year

<sup>1</sup> Grégory, *Hist.*, ii. p. 224, etc.

1349: for the author of the *Diarium* declares that his ancestors were in possession of the precious volume of the 'De Imitatione' long before. Then, as this work existed before Thomas à Kempis was born, Gersen must be the author.

Thus M. de Grégory argues. And it is to be remarked that this reasoning is directed against the rights of Thomas à Kempis, which, being overthrown, will go, he imagines, to establish the rights of Gersen. But be it observed, first, that neither the 'De Imitatione' of *De Advocatis* nor the *Diarium* make any mention of the Benedictine author Gersen. Neither do these arguments conclude anything in favour of Gersen, but by the aid of this false hypothesis,—that Gersen must be the author of the 'De Imitatione,' if Thomas à Kempis is not. But if the facts alleged were correct, which were supplied for the purpose of determining that Thomas had lost his right, it would still *not be permissible* to conclude thereupon that Gersen had acquired his. If Thomas à Kempis is excluded, the veritable author of the 'De Imitatione' is still to be found.

But, secondly, the facts which M. de Grégory allege do not exist. His manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' is *without date*, and *without the name of the author*; and is moreover a more modern composition than he supposes. The form of the letters have a striking relation to those in the book *De Meditatione Cordis*, by the famous Gerson of Paris, which is found copied in the same volume; and this last-named writing belongs very probably to the first part of the

sixteenth century. We will be generous, however, and allow that the copy might have been written at the end of the fifteenth century.

Moreover, thirdly, it must be observed, that all throughout, although the writing is neat and regular, the text is very defective<sup>1</sup>—such as indicates a copy recently made with a certain care over a copy already altered.

Many savans being consulted about the age of this manuscript, have been so obliging as to fix it, according to the desires of M. de Grégory, to the first years of the fourteenth century; but their opinion has never been ratified by the unanimous judgment of the savans. On the contrary, many distinguished palæographers whose judgment M. Gence has collected,<sup>2</sup> think that the manuscript *De Advocatis* does not show upon the face of it that it was before the time of printing. M. Tourlet, the senior Professor of the College of the Charters of the archives of the kingdom, is of this opinion, and says:—

“The specimen of the writing of the *manuscript de Advocatis*—from the multiplied abbreviations in the body of the work, and the little marks one observes on the many i's, and the pointed manner in which the figure 4 is made, which did not take place in the fourteenth century, nor at the commencement of the fifteenth,—appears to me to be written about the period of the invention of printing. The figure resembles that one of the *Diarium* which refers to the manuscript without date, and

<sup>1</sup> See the judgment of M. Dubner in the *New Journal Literature*, Leipzig, 1834. And that of M. Gazzera, Grégory, *Hist.*, ii. p. 271.

<sup>2</sup> Jugements motivés sur l'âge du *Codex De Advocatis*, dont les abréviations multiples, l'accentuation approchant du point, et la numération moderne, etc., ne permettent pas de le rapporter à une époque antérieure au xiv<sup>e</sup> siècle; recueillis et publiés par J. B. M. Gence, ancien archiviste au dépôt des Chartes, etc. Paris, 1835.

makes one suspect the age announced of 1349, where the 3 has been read in the place of 5, and all the more as the form of the writing is irregular and unconnected, and could not be known to be of the fourteenth century."

Thus M. Tourlet altogether rejects the supposed date of the manuscript of the 'De Imitatione,' and that of the *Diarium*.

The M. Abbot Labouderie, the old Vicar-General of Avignon, member of the Society of Antiquaries, is not less severe. "The writing of the 'De Imitatione,'" said he, "perfectly resembles that of the famous Arone manuscript. They both incontestably belong to the same epoch, that is to say, to the fifteenth century. It is very easy to observe that the miserable figures are of the same form as are actually in the printed books, especially the 4 and the 7, which determined the point of time to be that of the invention of printing."<sup>1</sup>

This remark is of great value, adds Mgr. Malou. The 4 of the middle age and the 7, of this peculiar form which is made, appear in a certain number of manuscript copies in the first part of the sixteenth century. I find them again, says Mgr. Malou, in a Psalter of the Abbey of St. Arnaud at Courtrai, copied in 1530.<sup>2</sup>

The manuscript *De Advocatis*, without date, without name, with modern figures, does not certainly then belong to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, as M. de Grégory pretends; but much more to the fifteenth, as M. Abbot Labouderie accords it, and in the opinion of Mgr. Malou, to the sixteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> *Jugements Motivés*, etc., p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *Recherches*, p. 287.



Then, fourthly, as to the connection which M. de Grégory would establish between this manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' and the *Diarium*; it is, says Mgr. Malou, *quite imaginary*. It is true that this copy of the 'De Imitatione' belonged, to all appearance, to the members of the family of De Avogadri in 1550, and in 1568: but the document does not at all by any means prove that this same volume belonged to the same family two centuries before, in 1349. M. de Grégory overleaped two centuries by a simple conjecture, which a simple denial on our part overthrows and destroys.

The *Diarium* does not stand any better the examination of a sensible criticism than the manuscript of the 'De Imitatione.'

This journal is entirely without value; it is written upon paper; all its leaves are torn; it is incomplete: the first facts which it mentions are of the year 1345, —the last of the year 1350; and it does not include more than a few months of these years. The notes have been added later than the text. The word "*Diarium*" is written at the margin, as well as the name of Joseph de Advocatis, and other names and words which have no sense. We are indebted for this description to the notary Dionysius, who sent it to M. de Grégory on the 31st January 1832.<sup>1</sup>

This *Diarium* is then at the most only a worthless piece of paper, adds Mgr. Malou, which has neither intrinsic worth nor extrinsic authenticity. The writing of it is evidently modern, as M. Tourlet has ob-

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. du liv. de l'Imitat.*, t. ii. p. 240.



served. The date of the 15th February, which answers to a Sunday, is very suspicious. The figure which some take for a 5 has been taken for a 4 by many savans. This method of reading it is much more probable than that of the *Diarium*, for in the passage which precedes, the news is given, day by day, of the 11th of February, of the 12th, and of the 13th; afterwards leaping from the 13th to the 15th, he passes the 14th. If M. de Grégory had given the lines which follow one would have been able to see whether the author did not mention the 15th after the donation. As soon as one admits the supposition there is a certain anachronism, because in the year 1349 the Sunday fell on the 15th, and not on the 14th of the month. Besides the figure they give for a 5 is altered;—one would say that another hand had modified it to give it the form of a 5.<sup>1</sup>

The cavalier manner in which the author of this journal calls the work, *Codicem de Imitatione Christi*, *manuscrit de l'Imitatione de Jesus Christ*, causes in the minds of others further perplexities. Only to consult the *Diarium* one would think that the book of the 'De Imitatione' has always been known under the name of the book of "*the Imitation of Jesus Christ*;" nevertheless all the documents of the fifteenth century that have been consulted and cited, prove that even at that epoch the four books of the 'De Imitatione' do not always bear in the manuscripts one uniform title. The name of the 'De Imitatione' was somewhat secondary, and made to follow other denominations.

<sup>1</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, p. 289.

It is thus that Buschius calls the work 'the book *Qui sequitur me*, de Imitatione Christi;' it is thus that the anonymous biographer of Thomas à Kempis says, that "the little book of the sentences on the humble Jesus is also called the 'Imitatio de Jesu Christi;'" it is thus also that in many manuscripts this work is entitled, "Admonitiones ad interna trahentes," and that the collection of the three or four books—the work—has been called, "De contemptu Mundi," "De consolatione interna," "De Conversatione," or "De locutione interna," etc.

It is true that Hermann Ryd used, even in 1454, the simple title 'De Imitatione Christi,' but is it likely that we should have encountered such a like medley of titles in the fifteenth century, if from the year 1349 the work had been perfectly known under its name 'De Imitatione Christi'? If it had been so, one would not have found at this age the books of the 'De Imitatione' separated, isolated, inserted among the works of Thomas à Kempis, and cited as distinct books. This great variety of manuscripts proves that, in the first years of the fifteenth century, these four books were just produced or brought into being, and did not constitute for nearly two centuries, as the *Diarium* supposes, a single work known under its title, 'De Imitatione Christi.'

The manner also in which the *Diarium* mentions the 'De Imitatione' for the year 1349 takes away from it all authority. The insignificance of the facts recalls takes from it altogether any kind of value. The author only occupies himself with trifles or thin

of little importance—the snow which falls—a meadow inundated by a stream—the repose of his wife, and other like events. In the midst of these common details there suddenly occurs the gift of the Codex 'De Imitatione Christi,' accompanied by an explanation on the assumed antiquity of this book . . . and then the author returns to the wind, and the rain, and the maladies of his wife. It has then the appearance, in one word, as if the author of it had only composed this journal to make known to posterity that the 'De Imitatione' existed in his time ; and he surrounds this fact with insignificant matters, lest he should be suspected of having this design. The artifice of an unskilled forger here forces itself upon all eyes.<sup>1</sup>

This is not all. The complete isolation of this *Diarium* is another mystery of which they have not given us the key. How explain the existence of this incomplete journal in the archives of a family who do not possess any other documents of this epoch ? The most active researches of M. Gustave De' Avogadri to find the genealogy of his ancestors have not ended in any result : he has not even found the traces of Jérôme and of Frédéric De Advocatis, who possessed his manuscript in 1550 and in 1568. The Bishop of Ivrée wrote to M. de Grégory that a certain Jérôme De Advocatis had been named Canon of his Cathedral 19th May 1524, and that he died in 1549, one year

<sup>1</sup> The writer, whilst on the Continent during the present year, 1876, had the opportunity of speaking to one who had seen and examined this manuscript, and was well versed in ancient writings, having the charge of one of the best European libraries for MSS., and upon his being asked what he thought of the manuscript in question, he replied without the least hesitation, "It is a pure fabrication."

before that Jérôme De Advocatis—the supposititious citizen—possessed the manuscript. All the researches which have been made by the brother Jean De Pasqualibus are left barren. M. Gustave De' Avogadri, who seconded by every means the generous efforts of M. de Grégory, discouraged by the uselessness of these researches, wrote to him on the 17th July 1832 to this effect :—

“ My researches on the genealogical table of the family De' Avogadri have reached a point beyond which I think it is impossible to proceed. I have returned from the bottom to the top of the archives oftentimes; for six months I have worked, and the most ancient genealogical table which I have discovered dates from about the year 1400. It appears to me, then, that one must abandon the game, since one cannot find any trace either of *Joseph*, or of *Vincent*, or of *Paraclete*; nevertheless I shall not lose sight of the affair.”

On the 14th April 1833 he writes from Bielle to the same M. de Grégory :—

“ So much as concerns my ulterior researches about our family, I must say to you that I have not been able to succeed in finding a satisfactory genealogical tree which goes back further than the fifteenth century, and even that which I have is not complete. What is more vexatious still, is that in the lands enfeoffed from the family, the books of the parishes do not show a single certificate of birth or death beyond the seventeenth century.”

Thus the fortunate *Diarium*, continues Mgr. Malou, has alone escaped the total destruction of the documents relative to the family De' Avogadri, and it is for us to learn that in 1349 the '*De Imitatione*' has been bequeathed by Joseph De Advocatis to his

brother Vincent, and that this volume has been possessed by their ancestors!

I ask, when one is free from prejudice and the interests of party, can we with any show of reason compare such a document to the visible testimonies existing, which point out to us the veritable author of the 'De Imitatione'? And if M. de Grégory himself had not been fascinated by the love of his country and his system, could he have had the courage to produce as a decisive proof of his opinion some torn sheets of paper, of which the origin is unknown, and of which the subject is insignificant? M. Thomassy could not refrain from saying, after having read the pretended demonstration, that *the arguments which M. de Grégory made use of are exceedingly feeble, or, to say better, of no value.*<sup>1</sup> And M. Onesimus Leroy declares that *the specimen of the 'Diarium' has not altered in any wise the opinion of Messieurs the members of the Academy of the Inscriptions and "Belles-lettres," and the distinguished men who have occupied themselves with this question.*<sup>2</sup>

The new defence then set up by M. de Grégory has thus been judged by competent men at Paris not to have advanced one single step the cause of Gersen.

We come then again to see that Gersen has no right to the honour of having composed the 'De Imitatione.' We have seen still more, that Gersen has not the right to be accounted among existing beings; let us then, again, say to-day what the authors of the

<sup>1</sup> *Gloria de France, Vie de Gerson*, p. 314. 1843.

<sup>2</sup> *Etudes sur les Mystères*, p. 424. Paris, 1837.



*Mémoires de Trévoux* said in 1726, viz., that the partisans of Gersen have not been able to make even the existence of Gersen probable.<sup>1</sup> What then must one think of his rights?

Since these exposures of the utter worthlessness of Gersen's claim to be the author of the 'De Imitatione,' by Eusebius Amort, and more recently by Mgr. Malou, it is strange that we should still find any supporters, and that at this day there should be persons who believe even in the existence of such an individual. One can only account for it on two grounds; *first*, that most of those who have thought that Gersen might probably be the author have been little acquainted with the complete overthrow of every particle of evidence which can give him the least standing ground; and that when better informed upon these matters they will not be so ready in future to stand up in his defence. *Secondly*, it is well known, from experience and constant observation of what is going on in the world, that the unceasing pertinacity and persistency in advocating a right to any title, whether of property or authorship, however unfounded it may be, however unlikely to be true, will nevertheless gain some adherents; and that a few, as it were, in very desperation, having once given in their adherence, will hold to a cause, notwithstanding it has failed to be established when tried over and over again by competent authority, and by those well qualified to judge of its validity, and when on these occasions the very hollowness of the evidence has been brought to light. On these

<sup>1</sup> Mal. 1726, t. ii. p. 246.



grounds, then, we need not be surprised if we should here and there meet with some who still believe in Gersen. We have seen, however, sufficient to satisfy us that his claims cannot for an instant be admitted, and that he is most probably nothing more than a nonentity.

## CHAPTER XV.

*The Authorship claimed in behalf of Jean Gerson,  
Chancellor of the University of Paris.*

IF Gersen of Vercelli be not the author of the book of the 'De Imitatione,' may it not be, then, that Gerson of Paris is, whose name and title are attached to so many manuscripts? We have seen that several of them designate this latter individual rather than the former, and hence it is asked, "Is there not some ground for believing that this Gerson is the real author?" At first sight there seems much to favour this idea; and there is, to say the least, good reason to enter upon a searching inquiry into the validity of his claim.

There is no doubt entertained about the reality of the person, as he makes a prominent figure in history. Moreover he is a real *author*, having composed several works of a like religious character to the 'De Imitatione,' especially the *De Meditatione Cordis*, which is sometimes found bound up with the former work. Further still, it may be said that Gerson was frequently acknowledged as the author of the 'De Imitatione,' in Italy as well as in France, during the fifteenth and

sixteenth centuries. Indeed, the reason and authorities for believing that he was the author of the book, rather than Gersen, appeared so considerable, that had it not been from the fear of disobliging the Benedictines, there is a strong presumption from what occurred, that the question would have been decided in his favour at the assembly at Paris in 1687, if not before that time.

Before we proceed further, however, with a statement of his claim, we will give a brief account of his life. It is so graphically and tersely given by Dr. Farrar that we prefer transcribing a portion of it—more especially as we purpose referring to it in our arguments afterwards—to giving it in other words:—

“Rising while yet young to a leading position, he was appointed Chancellor of the University of Paris before the age of thirty, and, struggling against popes and councils, and mobs and kings, became the stormiest champion of a stormy time. His life rang with combats and contradictions. Living in the perilous days of Azincour and of the Great Schism,—in the days when a maniac was king of France,<sup>1</sup> and a monster was pope at Rome,<sup>2</sup> and when a nation paralysed at once by foreign invasion and domestic misery was equally impotent to restrain the furious excesses of the nobles under the Duke of Burgundy, —we find him in politics, now a Burgundian thundering into the ears of princes the terrible maxim, ‘Nulla gravior Deo victima quam tyrannus;’ now an Armagnac pronouncing the funeral oration over the murdered Orleans, refusing to pay taxes to the Cabochiens, and hiding himself from their fury in the vaults of Notre Dame. In church policy we see him, now denouncing in burning language the autocracy of popes, and now accepting the humblest orders of monastic obedience. In religious controversy he is at once the burner of Huss and

<sup>1</sup> Charles VI. of France.

<sup>2</sup> John XXIII.

the model of Savonarola,—at one time urging what he calls the cruel mercy of putting to death the Wickliffe of Bohemia, and at another using language which leads to his denunciation by Romish bishops as a precursor of the Reformation. And, when all his life seemed to have culminated in one long failure; when the university, whose authority he had so splendidly supported, was humiliated and crushed; when he is forced to hide under a disguise, and wander away from the land to which he dared not return; when he found that the martyrdom of Huss had rather stimulated than checked the spirit of inquiry; when he had wholly failed to elevate the tone of a sordid episcopate, or bribe about the reform of a corrupted priesthood; when he had been unable to procure from the assembled Fathers of Constance, to whose influence he had so largely contributed, any decisive condemnation of the abhorrent doctrine of political assassination; forced then to see how utterly little is man even at his greatest, and how different are the ways of man's nothing-perfectness from those of God's all-completeness, the great chancellor, who had been the soul of mighty councils,<sup>1</sup> and the terror of contumacious popes, takes obscure refuge, first in a monastery of Tyrol,<sup>2</sup> afterwards under the rule of his brother at Lyons, and there, among the strict and humble Celestine monks, passed his last days in humility and submission."<sup>3</sup>

We may finish this glowing description of his life, which reads in some measure like that of Luther, by adding a few concluding words respecting him from Milman:—

"Gerson, the learned pious Gerson, dared not return to Paris, now in the power of Burgundy and the English; he lay hid for a time in Germany, lingering out a year or two at Lyons, and died a proscribed and neglected exile, finding his

<sup>1</sup> The members of the Council of Constance wept when they heard the news of his death.

<sup>2</sup> It is remarkable, adds Dr. Farrar, that no less than ten MSS., which attribute the work to Gerson, have been found in the Austrian abbey of Meick, in which he took refuge after the Council of Constance.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Farrar's Sermon, pp. 8, 9. St. James's Lectures, 1875.

only consolation—no doubt full consolation—in raptures of his Holy Mysticism.”<sup>1</sup> Mgr. Malou says that “he retired to the house of the Celestines at Lyons in the year 1425.”<sup>2</sup>

He died there in the year 1429, and was buried in St. Paul's Church, having these words written on his tomb, *Pœnitementi et credite Evangelio*, i.e. “Repent, and believe the Gospel,” words which he frequently used in his sermons. Some of Gerson's admirers also attempt to give an account of the way in which he came to write the ‘*De Imitatione* ;’ for they say the Celestines made a request that he would compose something for their instruction and consolation on the words of Christ, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross and follow Me.” Whereupon it is especially supposed that he granted them their request by writing the book which begins *Qui sequitur me*, the first book of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ because it appears from a letter of his to them, that he had accordingly fulfilled their desire. They state also that after this, he composed another treatise for them, upon these words, *Venite ad me omnes*, with which the fourth book of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ begins. What likelihood there is of this being true, or that one who had lived as Gerson had done was likely to compose the book, we shall shortly see.

In taking a survey of the various efforts and attempts made to give the authorship to Gerson of Paris, it will be seen that his partisans have never shown so much eagerness and confidence as the

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. of Latin Christ.*, vol. viii. p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> *Recherches*, p. 3.

defenders of Gerson of Vercelli. They have had in some sense a consciousness of the weakness of their cause, and they have only maintained it with a flimsiness which betokens among them the absence of true conviction. It was only for the short space of about fifteen years, that an ill-judged feeling of national vanity caused the partisans of Gerson to burst forth suddenly into poetical flights of victory, which were very little justified. This was the feeling with which the last champions descended into the arena, and surpassed their predecessors. How bold and illusory they were, we shall presently see. The number of the defenders of Gerson, we would however observe, is infinitely small, and appear but at rare intervals. M. Daunou, who appears favourable to Gerson, confesses that since 1615, when the controversy was started in which Dom Cajétan played so notorious a part, even to our times, they can only quote five or six writers who have supported this cause.<sup>1</sup> Since his time, however, a few more have appeared. Pierre Corneille said *he had wished that the rights of Gerson might be proved*, but they had not been demonstrated to him.<sup>2</sup>

Charles Labbé, Advocate,—who, it will be remembered, was appointed by Cardinal Richelieu to discuss the question of authorship between the Benedictines and Canons-Regular when they respectively designed to get the name of the one whom they supported attached

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des sçavants*, December 1826, and October 1827.

<sup>2</sup> *Vide* M. de Grigory, *Hist. du liv. de l'Imit.*, ii. p. 76, who gives the preface which Corneille placed at the head of his first edition of his translation into verse of the 'De Imit.' Rouen, 1653.



to the beautiful edition of the 'De Imitatione' ordered to be printed,—supposed Gerson to be the author, and proposed to the Cardinal that he should print the book under this name. But he stood alone in his opinion.<sup>1</sup>

P. d'Avrigni informs us in the year 1671 of his *Mémoires*, that Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley, had declared himself in favour of Gerson in 1642.<sup>2</sup> And MM. Haslé, Andry, and Grancolas severally speak in support of Gerson's claim.

In 1731 the Abbé Lenglet Dufresnoy attempted a new method of establishing the rights of the Chancellor. He imagined that the manuscript of the *Internelle Consolation*, which only contains an old French translation of the first three books of the 'De Imitatione'—the third book being at the beginning,—contained the original text of this work, and had for its author the Chancellor Gerson. This conjecture, however, as it will be seen, has not the least probability of truth in it.

Thirty years after this, the Abbé Fata, prior of the monastery of Brescia in Lombardy, boldly attributed the book of the 'De Imitatione' to Gerson, supposing that this book of right belonged to the author who, as he thought, had the most ancient title of possession. But as according to him the *first printed edition* of the 'De Imitatione' was published at Venice in 1483, with the name of Gerson, it was evident to

<sup>1</sup> *Cherretisme de Labbé pour la Restitution de Livre de Imitatione Christi à son vrai auteur Jean Gerson, Chancelier, etc.*

<sup>2</sup> *Tome iii. p. 103. 1739.*

him that Gerson was the author of the book.<sup>1</sup> There was, however, a printed edition of 1468 or 1472, with the name of Thomas à Kempis, and also a manuscript of 1425 under this name, of which he was ignorant, and the existence of which would overthrow his theory or conjecture. He was also simple enough to believe that the *Conférences aux Toulousains*, attributed to St. Bonaventura, were more ancient than Thomas à Kempis, and he did not see that if it were so, they were likewise anterior to Gerson, and completely destroyed his arguments. The following year, 1763, as if sensible of his error, he published a second edition of his Memoir, or rather a new Memoir, in which he abandoned all the arguments proposed in favour of John Gerson the Chancellor, and attributed the 'De Imitatione' to the brother of Gerson, who bore the same Christian name as himself—*Jean*, and who was prior of the Celestines at Lyons. He ended by saying that he was more uncertain about the matter in laying down his pen than when he first took it up. Thus, by his own confession, it is evident he published two useless volumes, which served no other purpose than to complicate the difficulty.

Half a century later, in 1809, M. Gence, who was attached to the ancient archives for the reception of charters, took in hand the cause of Gerson in the *Journal des Curés*, which was then published at Paris. Three years after, in 1812, M. A. A. Barbier embraced the opinion of M. Gence, and inserted also at the end

<sup>1</sup> A copy of this edition is to be found in the Cathedral Library of Durham, the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and in the British Museum.

of his *Dissertation upon the sixty French translations of the 'De Imitatione'* the *Considerations* of this writer upon the question relative to the author of the '*De Imitatione*'—considerations which obtained in 1833 the honour of a second edition.

M. Gence proclaimed rather than proved his opinion in several articles of the *Biographie Universelle*, and in a great number of separate papers, of which M. de Grégory has a great desire to preserve the titles.<sup>1</sup>

M. Daunou, whilst speaking in favour of Gerson, with some prudent reserve, limits himself, as it were, to refute the weak and insignificant objections that M. de Grégory made against M. Gence's system.

In 1837 M. Onésime Leroy adopted the hypothesis of L. Dufresnoy. He supposed that he had discovered in a manuscript of Valenciennes, written in 1462, the original *French* text of the first three books of the '*De Imitatione*,' which he attributes to Gerson. This is recorded in his *Études sur les Mystères*, or dramas of the middle ages. Unfortunately he could only justify his opinion by gratuitous assertions, arbitrary conjectures, and vague or forced inferences. Moreover, he states in this work that Gerson composed the '*De Imitatione*' at Lyons, in the last years of his life, among the Celestines who had given him shelter. But in his studies upon *Corneille and Gerson*, published in 1841, four years later, he has maintained that Gerson had composed this book at Bruges, when in the flower of his youth he exercised the functions of Dean of St. Donat. This last assertion, quite as gratuitous as the first, so

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. du livre de l'imit.*, ii. p. 215-219.

pleased the Abbé Carton, who, burning with zeal for the glory of his country, hastened to communicate an analysis of the observations of M. Leroy to the members of the historical society of which he was president, and published them under this title, *L'Imitation composée à Bruges, par un doyen de St. Donat*.<sup>1</sup> The observations of M. Leroy were very severely criticised by even the most learned partisans of Gerson, but it did not hinder the making for the Chancellor some new defenders.

MM. Mangeart, Montfalcon, Jehan S. Smith, and M. Paulin Paris, severally advocate the rights of Gerson.

In 1843, M. Thomassy, in his *Vie de Gerson*, whilst rejecting as illusory the proofs which MM. Leroy and Mangeart believed to be decisive, still supports the rights of the Chancellor of Paris; but withal there is so much reserve in his words, that it shows he has little confidence in his cause.<sup>2</sup>

The most ardent partisan of Gerson, however, the most fruitful in conjectures, and the boldest, without contradiction, is M. G. C. Vert of Toulouse, who, in three successive publications, and sufficiently ample, has attacked with a certain violence the rights of Thomas à Kempis and of Gerson, and has endeavoured to establish the rights of Gerson. Mgr. Malou, remarking upon these works, says—

“M. Vert's convictions are such, and the impulse to which he yields so violent, that he has been led to commit many errors without causing us to suspect his good faith,—without our having thought of accusing him of imposture. The love of

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Annales de la Société*, etc. Bruges, 1842.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue Contemporaine*, iv. pp. 301-309. Paris, 1851.

roth, and the interests of our cause, oblige us nevertheless to point out these digressions, so that the position may be quite clear, whilst we expose the weak side of M. Vert's pleading—we will even say, the emptiness of his efforts. From this point M. Vert has not made a single step in advance to further the cause of Gerson, and he is the last defender of Gerson known on the Continent."

In England, notwithstanding the several manuscripts and very early editions of the '*De Imitatione*' which we possess in various libraries under this name, Gerson has but few who will plead for him as the author of the book. Among these, however, and but lately, Dr. Farrar is to be found. He is far from positively asserting him to be the author, but there is an evident leaning to the belief that he is,—though he also conceives that no one man alone wrote it,—for on p. 11 of his Sermon he says,—

"And whether Gerson actually wrote the '*Imitatio*' or not, it seems to me that in many a sentence of it I catch the faint echo of accents which once rang with passion, though they are now curbed into humility,—the hollow and far-drawn murmurs that follow the detumescence of a storm."

And again, when speaking of his latter days—

"It is pleasant to think that, at such moments of despair and desolation, of perplexity and terror amid the ruin of all his objects, and the disenchantments of all his hopes, such a man as Gerson should have shown to weary souls the path of peace, and, greater in his downfall than in his splendour, should from the silence of his monastery have uttered the quiet voice which has led so many sinners to the feet of God,"—

words wherein he evidently takes up the opinion that Gerson composed the '*De Imitatione*' at Lyons.

But, in reply, may it not be said that this is very imaginary as respects Gerson, and that, in the '*De*



Imitatione,' the attentive reader fails to catch, in the faint echo, the accents of one who had mixed much with the world, and had been a leader among men in an eventful and troublous period? Is not the very texture of the whole work but the accents of one who had long kept aloof from the busy stir and unsatisfying ambition of a restless world? And must not the faint rumble of the strife of tongues and the tumults of war, instead of *coming from* the author in his cell, have *come to him from without*? Are not the sentiments of the 'De Imitatione' rather the reflections of one who has had borne to his ears the reports of the bitter contests and the cruel wrongs done by those who have been fighting for some earthly shadow—some favourite opinion? Is there not a stillness and simplicity as well as terseness in the book, which discloses to us the mind of one little accustomed to the intrigues and diplomacy of courts and councils; of one little used to the life which had once rung with combats and contradictions; of one little wont to elaborate or trim his sentences for popular favour? The thoughtful reader will rather catch the spirit and influence of one who has dwelt much and long in retirement with God, and upon the altar of whose heart the love of Jesus has steadily and fervently burnt for some time. Indeed, when speaking of the author, whoever he might be, in another part, Dr. Farrar more fairly delineates the life of such an one; for, in allusion to the life of a monk, which he supposes that of the author to have been, he remarks respecting him that "the writer had been cramped for years by the narrowness of the monastery," and,



"imperfect as may have been his theory of duty, he failed not to win the high grace of heavenly wisdom." And then, in a few lines lower down, he adds, "it is so of course with the isolated experiences which he has to offer,"—sentiments which might in some degree have been applicable to Thomas à Kempis, but not to the life of Jean de Gerson—even as he pictures it—and whose experience in the world had not been confined and limited, as he implies, but largely varied and very extensive.

In a note also to his discourse (page 9), Dr. Farrar observes, "Obviously the non-sacerdotal, non-Romanist character of the 'Imitatio' tells much more in favour of Gerson's authorship than for the claims of Thomas à Kempis." This allusion to Gerson's character is doubtless grounded on his determined opposition to the usurpations of the Pope during the greater part of his life, and especially at the Council of Constance. But have we not here an unfair estimate of the views which both these men held? Who that has read the life or the writings of Thomas à Kempis, and who knows something of the character of the "Brotherhood of Common Life" to which he belonged, but will acknowledge that he, too, was no upholder of papal corruptions and intolerance, though he, like Gerson, still held by some of the Romish errors? Nor had Thomas à Kempis any great reason to be an admirer or lover of the Papacy, when the founder of the society in which he had been reared was regarded with suspicion at Rome, and was hence put under a species of interdict by his Diocesan because he had begun and had already

effected some reformation in religion. Moreover, we must remember how Thomas and his brethren at the monastery of Mount St. Agnes were driven forth for nearly three years through Papal intrigues, and compelled to wander about for this time, to find a shelter for themselves elsewhere.

On the other hand, it would be difficult for the devout admirer of the 'De Imitatione' to bring himself to believe that one of the foremost persecutors of Jerome and John Huss, who were burnt at the stake for their opposition to Romish errors,<sup>1</sup> could be its

<sup>1</sup> When Jerome made a recantation and should have been set free, fresh articles were exhibited against him. "Many withdrew in indignation from the commission of inquiry. But different Commissioners were named at the instigation of his two implacable adversaries. The Patriarch of Antioch and (it is sad to write) the Chancellor Gerson urged this virtual breach of faith. Fresh charges were accumulated, etc."—Milman, *Lat. Christ.*, viii p. 300.

Speaking of the indictment of Huss, Dean Waddington says, "The secular sword slept peacefully throughout these disputes, though it was loudly evoked by the Archbishop (of Prague), and though Gerson himself raised his voice to awaken it." And in a note he says, "Sufficient extracts are given from Gerson's letter to the Archbishop by Cochlæna."—*Historia Hussitarum*, lib. i. p. 21 (ed. Mogunt. 1549). And as it is curious to observe in what language the great Church Reformer of his day justified the principle of persecution, we shall cite some passages from it:—"Inveniuntur adhuc hereses extirpate ab agro ecclesiastico diversis viis, veluti falce multiplici. Inveniuntur quidem primitus extirpate falce vel acuto sarculo miraculorum attestatum divinitus Catholicæ veritati, et hoc tempore apostolorum. Inveniuntur extirpate post modum per falcem disputationis argumentativæ per doctores. Sunt extirpate deinde per falcem Sacrorum Conciliorum, inventibus imperitoribus, quum disputatio doctrinalis particularium doctorum inefficax videtur. Tandem accessit, velut in desperata peste, securis brachii secularis excident hereses cum autoribus suis et in ignem mittens. *Provocans hoc tanta severitate et misericordia, ut sic dicatur, crudelitate ne verum talium, veluti cancer, serpat in perniciem tam propriam quam alienam.* Et ante multa tempore non minore peccatoribus ex sententia agere, sed statim ultiones adhibere magni beneficii est indicium." After showing that none of the ancient methods of extirpation were applicable to the existing heresy, he thus proceeds:—"Superest igitur, si de præmissorum nihil prosit, quod ad radicem infructuosam, immo maledictam, arboris ponatur securis brachii secularis. Quale hoc brachium invocare viis omnibus convenit, et expedit ad salutem omnium subditorum."—*List. of the Church*, p. 587. And, before the execution of

author. Observe how, in opposition to such a spirit as this, the book breathes forth words of peace and love, and even forbearance, towards those in error :—

“Those things which a man cannot amend in himself or others, he ought to suffer patiently, until God orders things otherwise.”<sup>1</sup>

And again—

“If one that is once or twice warned will not give over, contend not with him, but commit all to God, that His will may be fulfilled, and His name honoured in all His saints, who well knoweth how to turn evil into good.”<sup>2</sup>

Such sentiments are surely unsuited and in consonant to the spirit and temper of a persecutor ! Moreover, Gerson was opposed to the administration of the Holy Sacrament in both kinds, and advocated besides the prohibition for laymen to read the Holy Scriptures in their native language. The Chancellor of Paris took the lead in these movements. In his very elaborate treatise against double communion, Gerson discloses the source of his difficulty in this simple complaint :—“There are many laymen among the heretics who have a version of the *Bible in the vulgar tongue*, to the great prejudice and offence of the Catholic faith.” “It has been proposed,” he adds, “to reprove that scandal in the Committee of Reform.”<sup>3</sup> In both these particulars, also, Gerson is directly at variance with the principles and precepts of the ‘*De Imitatione* ;’ for, as we have before shown, there are several intima-

Jerome, “Gerson himself again took up the pen of bigotry, and again sought to dip it in blood. *Ibid.* p. 597.

<sup>1</sup> Book 1. chap. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Edw. Waddington, Hist. of the Church*, pp. 691, 692.

tions in the fourth book of the reception of the Holy Communion in both kinds ; and none can fail to have noticed how earnestly the author recommends to us the devout reading and study of God's Holy Word. But, as we are about to enter upon a more definite consideration of the proofs and arguments which have been advanced to support the claims of Gerson to be the author, we must reserve other remarks of this nature to their proper place.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### *The Claims of John Gerson contested.*

[N entering more particularly into an examination of the claims of Gerson to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione' we must not be dazzled by the number of reasons or the wary speciousness of the arguments advanced in his favour. For those who are prepared to sift them and weigh their worth will be more likely to be less persuaded than ever that he has any valid right to the title.

In this examination we purpose to consider—*First*, Whether any contemporary writers afford proofs of his claim; *secondly*, What is the value of the evidence arising from manuscripts and editions of the 'De Imitatione'; and *thirdly*, Other general points which militate against his having a right to the title.

*First*, as to contemporaneous testimony in support of Gerson being the author. Mgr. Malou, who has made an extensive search, and given much attention to the matter, says boldly and decidedly that he knows not of one.<sup>1</sup> He tells us, that not a single writer before the year 1429, when Gerson died, has

<sup>1</sup> "Je n'en connais pas un seul."—*Recherches*, p. 297.

assured us that the Chancellor was the author of it. This is the more to be noticed, because Gerson was so well known, and had long been a prominent character, and he forms a striking contrast to Thomas à Kempis, who was little known to the world, and would have remained so had it not been from the connection of his name with the 'De Imitatione.'

M. Vert, however, questions this assertion, and affirms that it is not difficult to fix the year even when he wrote. The testimonies of contemporaneous witnesses, he says, "rise in numbers;" and again he says, "The contemporaneous witnesses such as ours, if we know how to show them aright, will satisfy the most exacting."<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, we have a statement diametrically opposed to that of Mgr. Malou, which has just been stated. The question now is, What amount of truth is there—if there is any—in this counter-statement? We must look into the point a moment, and see how Mgr. Malou meets the assertion which sets his words at nought. "Behold a formal denial of our statement," he says in the third edition of his work, "and a magnificent promise! M. Vert assures us that the contemporaneous witnesses rise like enchantment to support the rights of Gerson! Astonished at this fine promise, we have eagerly looked over the pages of this learned author, so as to read there the names of those writers who, before the year 1429, or at least in the course of the fifteenth century, have hailed Gerson as the author of the book of the 'De Imitatione.' But what sur-

<sup>1</sup> *Étud. Hist. et Crit. sur l'Imitat. de J. C.*, par G. Ch. M. Vert, p. 37.



prise ! what deception ! the pretended contemporaneous writers, so pompously announced, are reduced, first, to P. Louis Gonzalez, who, *a century and a half, or thereabouts, after the death of the Chancellor*, relates that Ignatius Loyola had always with him *his Gerson* ; secondly, to the author of a memoir written about the year 1570 by a father of the Society of Jesus, upon the choice of making the best selection of ascetical works for the direction of souls ; a memoir where the '*De Imitatione*' figures under the name of Gerson ; and thirdly, to P. Pinelli, who has entitled a work where he proposes to recount the doctrines of the '*De Imitatione*,' *Gerson, ou de la perfection religieuse*, a book printed in the first years of the *seventeenth century*. Behold those whom M. Vert calls contemporaneous witnesses, and even *numerous contemporaneous witnesses !*"

I shall not insist upon the weakness of such a demonstration, continues Mgr. Malou ; it is apparent to all eyes. One can scarcely understand that a writer who is reputed to write for reflecting men would dare to produce such proofs. To cite seriously as *contemporaneous* witnesses of Gerson, writers who flourished *a century and a half after his death*, is it not to abuse the good faith of his readers ?

M. Vert quotes P. Pinelli as a *contemporaneous* witness of Gerson. Although this "religious" died in 1607, yet none of his works, as far as can be seen, have been printed before the year 1602. This is pretty strong ; but what is more remarkable still is, that M. Vert has not the right to quote P. Pinelli as a witness

whatever of the rights of Gerson; for this pious writer, quoted by Rosweyde, declares, in his preface, that he purposes to write a book SIMILAR to that which Gerson OR Thomas à Kempis has written upon the Imitation of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> P. Pinelli is then quite as much a witness for the rights of Thomas à Kempis as for those of Gerson.

This is but one instance out of many, wherein we perceive to what length the zeal of partisanship carries a learned man. To support his cause M. Vert will distort the meaning of an author, and suppress part of the truth, which, in all fairness, he was bound to have brought forward. And because it would upset, or go against his cause, he dare not tell the whole truth. Such an instance as this makes us suspect the badness of the argument, and takes away our dependence upon what is said by the advocates of Gerson. But further than this, it only tends strongly to confirm the statement of Mgr. Malou, that there is not a single contemporaneous witness in favour of Gerson. One sees not only that the fifteenth century does not furnish any witness who supports the rights of Gerson, but that one of the highest authorities which he produces refuses him every kind of right, unless we count those as well which attribute the 'De Imitatione' to Thomas à Kempis as the undoubted author. "It is only

<sup>1</sup> Here are the words of P. Pinelli, as reported by P. Rosweyde, p. 360 of *Vindic. Kemp.*, Antv., 1617:—"Institutum meum est, religiose lector, style simplici et perapicuo, libellum conscribere non absimilem illi, qui, *De Imitatione*, auctore *Gersona* VEL *Thoma de Kempis* inscribitur, sed religiosorum professioni imprimis accommodatum." It is evident then that P. Pinelli did not pronounce upon the question of the authorship of the 'De Imitatione,' which he left as undecided.

towards the middle of the seventeenth century that Gerson has found a small number of timid and isolated defenders."<sup>1</sup>

(2.) But there is another phase of the question to notice—the negative side taken by early writers, which is kept back, but which forms a complete argument against the supposition that Gerson was the author. One of the first editors of Gerson has declared, in 1488, that the certain author of the '*De Imitatione*' was Thomas à Kempis, and *not Gerson*. This testimony is remarkable, adds Malou, because it is furnished to us by an admirer of Gerson, who has not abandoned the claim of the Chancellor without good reason.

It is known also that there is an edition of the book of the '*De Imitatione*,' published at Lyons in 1489, under the name of Thomas à Kempis, and following this in the same book a treatise of *De Meditatione Cordis*, under the name of Gerson. Now, let it be remembered that Gerson passed the last days of his life in this place, that he died there, and obtained a fine monument there also. Yet, in the very town of Lyons, where he was so well known, they positively refused to him the honour of having composed the book, and attribute it to Thomas à Kempis.<sup>2</sup>

It is important also to notice another fact, which will weigh materially against the cause of Gerson. Six years before the death of the Chancellor, a brother and namesake of the Chancellor, called *Jean de Gerson*, also a religious Celestine at Lyons, received in 1423,

<sup>1</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, pp. 297-300.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 362, 363.

on the part of brother Anselm, a Celestine like himself, a pressing invitation to indite an exact catalogue of the works of his brother. This demand was willingly complied with. The list which he made out has reached us entire; and we see there enumerated, with a marked complacency, and with details that show a perfect knowledge of the subject, all the principal works of Gerson.

The author of the catalogue indicates what was the first work of the Chancellor. He distinguishes what were composed in verse, and what were composed in prose. He indicates the volumes which form the collection of sermons, or of prayers, relative to the same object. In one word, we see an attentive writer, who can forget nothing which can contribute to the praise of Gerson. He has not made this catalogue in chronological order, but in the order of his *souvenirs*, and of his personal impressions. This document thus offers every guarantee of exactitude and truth.

Well! it is a singular circumstance, which speaks volumes,—in this catalogue, made under the eyes of Gerson, and by his brother Gerson, the ‘*De Imitatione*’ does not figure!

Although negative, still, under the circumstances pointed out, this argument is decisive.

M. Gence replies, however, that this catalogue is incomplete. The *Floretus* of Gerson and his translation of *Stimulus Amoris* from St. Bonaventura are wanting.

“I allow it,” says Mgr. Malou, “but it is not to be contested. I think, that this catalogue contains the most remarkable works

of Gerson; the author who enumerates even works in little volumes, and those of little importance, could not have omitted the principal works of the Chancellor. Now the 'Imitatio' is not one of those vulgar productions that would be likely to pass unperceived. If Gerson composed it, it would be the finest jewel of his crown. His other writings are very inferior to this masterpiece. And one would imagine that his brother would not be able to forget it."—*Recherches*, pp. 365, 366.

And here a further point of interest is started. M. Thomassy would not have the 'De Imitatione' left out in this list.

"This brother," he says, "would have us to understand that Gerson, in his retreat, composed a *treatise on Piety opposed to Religious indifference* . . . and is not this as much as to say in indirect terms that Gerson composed the *De Imitatione de Christi*? Nothing in anywise proves the contrary."—*Revue Contemp.*, t. iv. p. 304.

No, assuredly, one cannot call the 'De Imitatione,' even in indirect terms, a *treatise against religious indifference*. This designation cannot be applied to it under any circumstances. The subject of the book is very different. Besides, is it not an hypothesis as little possible as it is without foundation? Why does the author of the catalogue give the exact titles of the other works of Gerson, while he is silent about the most remarkable of all the titles? Nothing proves the contrary, it is said! But I answer, says Malou, that everything proves the contrary: both the end that is proposed in writing this catalogue, and the manner in which it is written; and the whole series of historical proofs which can be brought forward in favour of Thomas à Kempis; yes, all prove the contrary. The silence of Gerson's brother is tantamount



to a formal denial that Gerson ever wrote the book of the 'De Imitatione.'<sup>1</sup>

Again, M. Vert comes forward and says, "The 'Imitatio' is here (i.e. in this said catalogue) designated in lively terms, and such as are suited to it."<sup>2</sup> What are these lively terms? Here they are: "Gerson has just written some *remarkable works*, that I have read with much avidity, when they were communicated to me, and I have been intoxicated with their doctrine as with a delicious wine."<sup>3</sup>

These *remarkable works*, according to M. Vert, are the book of the 'De Imitatione.' Here again we see how they supply, by their boldness of language, the absence of reason. Whom will they persuade, asks Malou, that this expression, "*opuscules remarquables, egregia opuscula*," designates the 'De Imitatione,' by a name which is suited to it? How dare any one advance such a paradox, when elsewhere they rave about the works of the Chancellor as if they were so many masterpieces? How could any one pretend that many

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Recherches*, p. 367.

<sup>2</sup> *Études*, p. 226.

<sup>3</sup> "Gloriabundus in Domino mihi dixit: aliquando sentire ingenium clarius et vivarius inesse nunc tibi quam unquam antes . . . Ob hoc etiam egregie scripsit opuscula, quæ dum mihi nuper communicavit, tam avido perlepsi ut illorum doctrina veluti vino meracissimo ebriatus fuero. Optoque æpius, amantissime mi frater Anselme, . . . poculum ex his tribuere. Sed longa regionum distantia qua corpore non animo separamur, hoc ad tempus vetat. Propterea annui ut hæc ipsa quæ novissime vel antea composuit idem germanus, in tabula quadam annotare, per quam possis vel quæ jam acceperis, vel quæ tibi adhuc desunt agnoscere . . . Non autem eo tempore vel ordine quo peracta sunt ordinavi omnia; sed prout occurrerant memoris. . . ."—*Epistola* Jean Gerson, ord. Célestinorum, directæ fratri Anselmo ejusd. Ord. super opuscula Joannis Cancellarii Parrhiensis. Ed. de Dupan, t. i. pp. clxiv. clxix. in the old editions and at the end of the 3d volume. The catalogue which accompanies this letter is entitled: *Sequitur annotatio opusculorum Johannis Cancellarii Parrhiensis, quorum multa deperierunt; de multis incertum est si, et ubi, supersint, etc.*



of the treatises of Gerson bore the mark of the 'De Imitatione'? Surely such reasoning is ridiculous!

But furthermore, the brother of Gerson declares that he annotates in his catalogue the works of Gerson which were composed *at the last place, quæ novissime composuit annui annotare!* If the 'De Imitatione' had been written in these days of inspiration, the brother of the Chancellor ought,—as one is assured he did,—to have marked the title of it, so as to have kept the formal promise, which he made in his last letter, and to have clearly indicated the book which was above all the rest. But the modesty of Gerson! If this modesty of his brother prevented him from calling the 'De Imitatione' by his name, why did it not prevent him designating the other remarkable works of the Chancellor by their veritable titles? Why did it not prevent him making an exact and detailed catalogue of all his works? Modesty requires far more imperiously that he should have abstained from setting forth this catalogue, than that he should have abstained from indicating the title of the 'De Imitatione.'

Another way remained open to the partisans of Gerson. They say, "It might be that the 'De Imitatione' was composed after the year 1423, when this catalogue was made." This response would hold good if there were not two great drawbacks to it: the first is, it overthrows the hypothesis of the Gersonists, who fix the production of the 'De Imitatione' to the first years of the fifteenth century, to an epoch when Thomas à Kempis, it was thought, could not possibly

have composed it ; the second is, that it is contradicted by a posterior catalogue of the works of Gerson,—a catalogue signed in April 1429, three or four months after the death of the Chancellor.

But further still : Jacob de Ciresio, at the end of the catalogue written by Jean Gerson, has marked a certain number of the works of the Chancellor which appeared more worthy of attention and more useful than the others. After having indicated the works composed on the *Usage de la Viande*, composed at Paris in the year 1400, and the treatise *Du Discernement des Esprits*, composed at Constance, he speaks of a great treatise, *Sur le Magnificat*, which includes several special treatises composed at Lyons, and among these special treatises he points out the newest as well as the most remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

Consider for one moment the details in which Jacob de Ciresio engages himself ! He even goes so far as to indicate the very finest treatise,—that of the great commentary on the *Magnificat*, composed at Lyons ! But for that which concerns the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ which they pretend was composed at Lyons, he does not say a word ! This silence, does it not prove, by the latest evidence, that the ‘*De Imitatione*’ is not

<sup>1</sup> “Subscribuntur per me Jacobum de Ciresio tituli quorundam opusculorum Domini mei Domini Joannis Cancellarii Parisiensis, cum quibusdam annotationibus, pro Domino Oualdo, de domo majoria Carthusie, ubi jam posita est : *Tractatus de non esse Carnium*, Parisius legendo compositus, ante annos Domini 1400 ; . . . *Tractatus de discretionem spirituum*, in Constantia post longe compositus : *Tractatus super Magnificat*, continens multos particulares tractatus, compositus Lugduni, sicut apparet ex tenore ejus. *Præcipuus inter particulares tractatus, apparet tibi bonus super illo versiculo Esurientes*.” The catalogue of J. de Ciresio is omitted by Dupin ; but it will be found at the end of the third volume of the works of Gerson, in the old editions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

counted among the works of Gerson by those who were the most likely, of any persons, to know whether it were so or no? Is it possible that the brother of the Chancellor, and Jacob de Ciresio, one of his most devoted friends, should omit, either willingly or through forgetfulness, in a catalogue of the most remarkable works, and the most recent of Gerson, a book such as the '*De Imitatione*'? Truly, when in good faith one examines this omission, one is compelled to confess that their silence is equivalent to a veritable denial.<sup>1</sup>

But what shall we say with regard to the MANUSCRIPTS which are advanced in favour of Gerson? How will you deal with these, it may be asked, or how can they be set aside? We will inquire into the question. The partisans of Gerson cite in his favour two manuscripts *dated*, which bear the name of the Chancellor; one was a copy in 1441. This is the ninth we name as brought forward in favour of Gerson of Vercelli; the inscription does not bear the name of Gerson in full, but is abbreviated to *Gers*. It is the Pollingen manuscript. The other for Gerson is dated 1460. The first, then, would be twelve years, and the second thirty-one years, after the death of Gerson, the supposed author. Thus there is not a single *dated* manuscript which they can produce, as written during his lifetime; it is only some years after his death that two copies were written out with his name attached to them. This, as will be seen, is very different in the case of Thomas à Kempis.

Of the *non-dated* manuscripts, they cite, among

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Recherches*, pp. 365-370.

others, that of Cambrai, of Lechassier, of Reichenberg, of Chigi, of Turin, of Grégorien : a brief description of them is given by M. de Grégory in his *Histoire du livre de l'Imitation*.<sup>1</sup> We would observe, however, that of all those that strictly belong to Gerson, and are not claimed by the Gersonists, there is only one,—that of Cambrai,—that is of any date supposed to be anterior to the period in which Thomas à Kempis is said to have written the 'De Imitatione.' This manuscript, be it remembered also, is *without date*, and the fixing of the date of it to 1390 is as the Gersonists themselves have determined. If, however, the Cambrai manuscript really belonged to the year 1390, Gerson would then have composed the 'De Imitatione' before the age of twenty-seven, since he was not born till 1363 ; and this statement would thus agree but little with the assertion made by both the Gersonists and Gersenists, who pretend that Thomas à Kempis was not able to compose this book in 1414, that is, at the age of thirty-four. The date, however, is not proved—having been fixed from interested motives ; and we must take into account that the authority of the manuscripts of the fifteenth century are considered by the learned in these matters very precarious, and not to be relied upon, when not supported by some other certain evidence of one kind or another.

And further, what makes the matter very doubtful with regard to all these manuscripts is, that from what has been already stated—while Gerson lived, and even

<sup>1</sup> Tom. i. p. 310.

for a century after his death, no author attributed the 'De Imitatione' to him; while, on the other hand, some of his admirers were convinced that he had not composed this book, and plainly said so. The inscription of these several manuscripts then do not rise above the authority of the three manuscripts and the five printed editions which attribute the 'De Imitatione' to St. Bernard, and the six or seven other manuscripts which indicate other supposed authors.

As to the theory advanced by M. Thomassy, that the manuscripts cited in favour of Gersen which bear the words "Chancellor of Paris" ought to be put down to Gerson, there is some justice in it, but it will little ameliorate the cause of his candidate, if we admit the others put down to Gersen which are without the designation of the Chancellor of Paris, for there are several where Gersen is called "Abbot," or, "of Vercelli,"—terms which do not properly suit Gerson. All these manuscripts attest also the ignorance of the copyists—who have not known how to write correctly a celebrated name—the name of an author whose reputation at the time ought to have made the fortune of their copy. Let the defenders of Gerson and Gersen explain the matter, what is meant by these differences in the various manuscripts; but whatever their decision, it may be said to one and the other, it is not reasonable to oppose to the rights of Thomas à Kempis, as respectable authority—as proved facts—inscriptions which bear upon them the manifest marks of ignorance, or rather of manifest unpardonable carelessness.



(3.) The same remarks may be applied also to the Editions which bear the name of Gerson.

M. de Gregory, we find, counts up thirty-five of them. It is a large number, but when examined, what is proved? We have seen how the number has been made up, and how it is consequently seriously reduced, since twelve of the Italian editions were made in the single city of Venice, and having respect unto the routine that then existed, these twelve only in reality represent one. But it is further observed, that the printers of the fifteenth century did not use much criticism in the printing of their books. Did it not simply suffice, asks Mgr. Malou, that a single printer, by negligence—perhaps from speculation, to put the book into vogue,—may have falsified the title of the book, and inscribed there a known name, so that twenty or thirty printers may have produced this title without suspecting the fraud or the mistake that had been imposed upon them? A book without an author's name might not be considered so acceptable; and what name would be more acceptable than that of Gerson, who had then made for himself a name; and having published several works on religious subjects, might be regarded as a person likely to be the author; and, since the name of the author was unknown to the printer, might he not be induced to give what, to his mind, was the probable one? Might there not, moreover, be some ground for the printer's adopting Gerson's name, as the result of a voluntary error on his part, arising from his finding placed at the end of some copies of the '*De Imitatione*' the



book of Gerson called *De Meditatione Cordis*? Thus, the confusion of names once introduced, the printers would naturally retain it without much reflection or mental reservation.

Whilst error was perpetrated on the one side, however, let it be observed that truth was respected on the other. From the year 1468 to 1500 it is made out that there are no less than *twenty-two editions* under the name of Thomas à Kempis.<sup>1</sup> Many of them would be seen at Paris and Lyons, where Gerson was well known. That published at Lyons in 1489 is especially remarkable, because in the same volume is found the text of the 'De Imitatione' with the name of Thomas à Kempis, and the book *De Meditatione Cordis* under the name of Gerson. If the inscriptions of the volumes have all the value which the partisans of Gerson attribute to them, we must allow that this edition of 1489 singularly disarranges their calculations.

For the rest, the authority of these inscriptions, which depend nearly always upon the caprice of the printer, is not very great in the editions of the fifteenth century, at least it is stated there is not found in them manifest traces of a critical judgment. It is desirable to notice these indications in the edition of the works of Gerson given in 1488, at Strasburg; the editor discusses therein the authenticity of the principal books which he reproduces, and he declares that the 'De Imitatione' is *not the work of Gerson, but properly of Thomas à Kempis*. This testimony, reflective and

<sup>1</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, pp. 114, 115, 304.

reasonable, has a decisive value. But the inscriptions which reproduced by chance, as it were, one or another author's name, are not really of any value. The extreme variety that one notices in them proves that they have been adopted without much consideration. What was said of the copyists of the manuscripts may be said in some measure of the publishers: if before admitting them they had consulted the rules of criticism they would not have printed the '*De Imitatione*' under the names of St. Bernard, of St. Bonaventura, of Gerson, of Gersen, and of Thomas à Kempis, without inquiring whether they were on the right road, or otherwise. The appearance of so many names ought to have awakened caution, and led them to search further into the matter; but it does not appear to have been so. This strange and general confusion carries away from all champions for the time the right of invoking the editions of the '*De Imitatione*' published in the fifteenth century. The Kempists have no need of this assistance; they have many editions, but they have more material evidence to depend upon. The Gersonists, who have not contemporaneous witnesses to quote, who cannot struggle against Thomas à Kempis on the ground of manuscripts, in seeing themselves deprived of the editions of the fifteenth century, as being of little value for evidence, are to be pitied. They have reason to despair of their cause. It must be confessed they have warmly and vigorously contested the case, but the rights of truth must prevail before those of Gerson.

We believe then that it has been proved in a

satisfactory and even irrefutable manner that neither the manuscripts nor the editions printed in the fifteenth century, which bear the name of Gerson, can establish the rights of the Chancellor of Paris, and that they leave intact the rights of Thomas à Kempis.

(4.) A separate allusion in passing must here be made to the *Valenciennes* manuscript. In 1837 M. Onesimus Leroy adopted the hypothesis of Lenglet Dufresnoy, who supposes that he has discovered in the *Valenciennes* manuscript, written in 1462, the original French text of the first three books of the 'De Imitatione,' which is attributed to Gerson, and which bears in many manuscripts the title of *Internelle Consolation*. Although this opinion, that the first three books of the 'De Imitatione' were first written by Gerson in French, has not met with a single partisan since it was enunciated, until our time, it has appeared to please in these latter days many of the defenders of Gerson.

It is hardly worth while entering into the whole of this part of the controversy; still those who wish to learn more about it, may do so by looking into Malou's *Recherches*, pp. 306-325. Suffice it to say, that it is not very acceptable to some of the partisans of Gerson. M. Thomassy, who warmly espouses the cause of Gerson, speaks slightly of it. "They make a great noise," says he, "about the manuscript *Valenciennes*."<sup>1</sup> "This manuscript," pursues he, "instead of serving the cause of Gerson, would become unfavourable to him, if they

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Gerson*, pp. 319, 322.

quoted it afresh, as if it were of some value."<sup>1</sup> "So that," he concludes, "the question has not made a single advance since M. Gence."<sup>2</sup> The Abbot Dassance is even more severe in the judgment he gives upon this hypothesis of M. Leroy.<sup>3</sup> And so are MM. Moland and D'Hericault, in the particulars they give of it. "In the Valenciennes manuscript there is a literal translation, clumsily and servilely rendered from the Latin; there is nothing, or very little, to praise in this work; the phrases are dry and stilted, without connection between them; and the reading, as M. Onesimus Leroy has confessed, is most painful. It would be difficult to imagine how a work could be more completely in disagreement with the genius of Gerson, and with his style—that long-winded style of the oratorical writer,—than that of the *Internelle Consolation*."<sup>4</sup>

From these remarks the reader can judge the value of the Valenciennes manuscript, and determine in some degree whether it lends any support to the cause of Gerson.

(5.) The last publications in favour of Gerson's claim which we ought to notice, are those two by M. G. Ch. Vert of Toulouse. The first is entitled, *Études historiques et critiques sur l'Imitatione de J. C. considérée dans ses origines, ses textes, son auteur, d'après les documents authentiques*, par G. Ch. M. Vert, 254 pp. in 32mo: Toulouse et Paris, 1856. The other publication bears this title, *Gersoniana, ou l'Imitation*

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Gerson*, pp. 328, 329.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 330.

<sup>3</sup> *Vie de Gregory*, *Hist.*, t. ii. p. 365.

<sup>4</sup> *Le livre de l'Inter. Consolat.*, Introd. p. lxxxvi.

*de J. C. dans la vie et les œuvres de Gerson, etc., 1857.*

It is not necessary to enter at length upon the detailed examination of them. "We have analysed with scrupulous attention," says Malou, "the two little volumes of M. Vert. . . . He has produced no new documents, he has alleged no new fact, he has not cited any contemporaneous witness, notwithstanding his formal promise. All his resources consist in very bold and venturesome allegations, in reconciliations more or less happy, in conjectures or contrivances without any bearing."<sup>1</sup> In a note at the foot of the page there are these caustic remarks, painfully, as it were, drawn forth from Malou, when constrained to defend his cause:—"It consists in lies opposed to alleged facts, false or invented to please; in rectifications of facts disguised or altered; in express concessions as to facts without meaning, from which nothing can be concluded. M. Vert proposes many arguments of this kind."<sup>2</sup>

It is useless to pursue these fresh attempts to support the cause of Gerson; they more than ever weaken it, as they show how little there is of any moment that can advance or sustain his claim.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 344, 345.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 345.

<sup>3</sup> Those, however, who wish to see further criticisms upon M. Vert's late works are referred to Malou's *Recherches*, pp. 344-354.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### *Further Objections to Gerson's Claim.*

WE must now, however, enter upon a few *general* remarks bearing upon Gerson's claim. How shall we reply, for instance, to what is said about the similarity of style between the well-known works of Gerson and the 'De Imitatione'? Much has been said on both sides, both for and against this likeness in Gerson's writings. It is indeed one of those matters in which difference of opinions will exist, and about which there is some difficulty in coming to a decision. We must candidly confess that we fail to perceive that similarity which some appear to imagine there is, and that, on the contrary, there is such a dissimilarity that an examination must assuredly tell against Gerson. But instead of putting forward our own opinion merely, we would rather leave the reader to judge upon the matter for himself from the evidence which lies before us. We therefore at once quote a passage from Gerson's well-known work, the *De Meditatione Cordis*, to which reference has already been made, as one of the treatises of Gerson, which is found bound up with the 'De Imitatione' in some of the editions, and we



think it will be seen at a glance that there is a wide difference in the style of its composition from that of the '*De Imitatione*.' In *Consideration VII.* we read as follows:—

"For when on one side I reflect how, without the exercise of meditation, no person can ever come to contemplation, setting aside the special and miraculous interposition of God in the case; yea, that no person can be so much as directed towards this high state, without first entering into this way,—much less feel it and possess it; and how it is impossible for any one without it to square himself as he ought, according to the most perfect rule of the Christian religion; then I dare not conceal what I have upon me to write, and I am all on fire to persuade and encourage others to the study of meditation.

"But, on the other side, while having so often experienced the danger thereof, I diligently reflect on the difficulty and hazard of it, and the exceeding rareness of arriving to that which meditation strives to reach, and which it labours to draw the heart to, I am then struck as it were with a certain numbness all over me, and am, as it were, stupefied with the dread that is upon me, being unable so much as to say or to write one word. Yet after this, the former reflections return upon me afresh, and then I am in part encouraged."

Now this is but a fair specimen of the rest of the treatise, and it must be obvious to most people that the "swing" or length of the sentences is at least four times the length of the '*De Imitatione*,' and that, to get the complete sense of what the writer is saying, it is necessary to read on to the end. There is not that short, terse, sententious method, whereby you gain in a few words a complete and definite thought or idea. Instead of brevity, we have diffuseness; instead of point, we have explication—a learned treatise, such as might come from the head of an University; not the

simple, unadorned, pure utterances of a devout soul unaccustomed to the schools of rhetoric. Now, put alongside this passage of Gerson's one taken from the 'De Imitatione,' it is immaterial from what part, for there is a wonderful similarity in the peculiar structure of the sentences throughout all the four books, though, owing to the diverse character of the religious subjects, the author necessarily adopts, to a certain extent, a different method, as might be expected; for instance, when he gives counsels for the divine life in the first book, he will speak differently when he unfolds to us the devout breathings of his own soul in the third. But to take an example, we choose a passage from the first book, at the beginning of the second chapter :—

(1.) "Every man naturally desires to know; (2.) but what availeth knowledge without the fear of God? (3.) Surely an humble husbandman that serveth God is better than a proud philosopher who, neglecting himself, is engaged in studying the heavens. (4.) Whoso knoweth himself is lowly in his own eyes, and delighteth not in the praises of men. (5.) If I understood all things in the world, and had not charity, what would it avail me in the sight of God, Who will judge me according to my deeds?"

Take any one of the above sentences which have been numbered, and they will be found severally complete and independent in themselves; though the subject in hand is never lost sight of, but steadily and pointedly pursued, there is a certain kind of disjointedness, whereby the sentences do not hold by or depend one upon another; but there is in each sentence by itself a clear, distinct, idea which may be taken and dwelt upon separately from the others. The subject

he is writing upon stands in short, bare, pithy sentences, where one is not necessary to the other ; but, if you stop after the first, or take the second or the third by itself, you carry off some definite thought. Whatever is said seems to come from some heavenly inspiration, given at the moment, all-sufficient in itself, and as he recounts the thoughts of his heart, which fruitfully succeed one another, there is no studied disquisition or long stretch of mind needed, before you can comprehend his words. There is then a striking difference between the structure of the sentences in the '*De Imitatione*' and the writings of Gerson ; and so great is it, that the wonder is that it should ever have been advanced as an argument in favour of Gerson, that his writings bore a similarity to the '*De Imitatione*,' because, upon a comparison of them, it does not require much perception to see how widely different the style is, and that it rather tells against his being the author of that celebrated book, than otherwise.

There is also another difference to be observed, besides that of the structure of the sentences, between the writings of Gerson and that of the '*De Imitatione*.' It is to be noticed that, in the latter book, few works are referred to or quoted, unless it be texts from the Scriptures and words from the Breviary ; neither are other examples usually given than those of Christ and the saints of old, chiefly those of Abraham, Moses, David, John the Baptist, St. Paul, St. Laurentius, St. Agatha, St. Agnes, and that of the devotees with whom the author evidently lived. He rarely refers

to anything in profane history, and seems oblivious of it. Now, when we turn to the writings of Gerson we find that it is otherwise with him. We again take the treatise written by him, to which allusion has been made, and from which a quotation has just been given—the *De Meditatione Cordis*,—and we find references made to other authors and other examples, and such also as arise from the study of ancient classical history, which certainly indicates a diverse training of the mind to that which is manifest in the general character of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’ In looking through this latter work, how rarely, if ever, do we come upon such passages as these, taken from the *De Meditatione Cordis* :—

“Easy is the descent of souls into the region of darkness; according to that of the poet—

‘ . . . Facilis descensus Averni :  
Sed revocare gradum, superasque evadere ad auras,  
Hic labor, hoc opus est.’ (Vale *Consid.* 111.)

“It is a maxim of philosophy, grounded on experience, ‘that Art and Virtue are conversant about what is difficult.’ As the art of painting, the art of writing, the art of singing, or of playing on musical instruments: the virtue of chastity, the virtue of fortitude, the virtue of sobriety, and so forth.”

And so also again in the same chapter :—

“So that hence the very same philosopher, who had said that ‘Art was about things difficult,’ said also that ‘perfect Art useth not to deliberate;’ because when it is perfected in any one, its acting then is so easy as not to need longer any deliberation, but is become, as it were, natural to it.”—*Consid.* x.

Again, in the next chapter we read—

“For so far is the soul from gaining any advantage by it (loose cogitation), that, as *Seneca* hath well observed, whosoever

shall take pleasure in such like wandering and disorderly thoughts, he shall be sure not to miss some sorrow."—*Consid.* XL

Here is another passage, very forcible, but oh how different from the 'De Imitatione' !—

"If any one has not gone through the work of purification in some good degree, and he attempt to meditate *as a dove*, while he is yet unpurged from his vices, he shall instead thereof meditate as an old *ape*, or as a *monkey* that is accustomed to his tricks, upon some mischievous designs, some subtle devices, or some malicious fetches. Or he shall meditate as a *mad dog*, biting his own tongue, or, according to the words of the satirist—

' . . . silentia rodens,'

that is, secretly gnawing what he refrains from uttering, and eating down, as it were, silently the poison of his own madness."—*Consid.* XVI.

And once more—

"This is a received maxim in the schools, 'that all our knowledge proceeds from our senses;' as also this, 'that to every one that understandeth the speculation of phantasms is needful;' even so the meditation of our hearts takes its origin from sensible objects and figurative ideas."—The rules following *Consid.* XVII.

These instances will suffice, one would imagine, to show that the 'De Imitatione' must have proceeded from another mind, otherwise educated and differently formed; though both the author of the 'De Imitatione' and Gerson may be said to occupy their minds on deeply religious subjects, yet their method of opening, explaining, and enforcing them severally are totally different. For, as the strata through which water flows gives a certain character to the streams which come forth, so is it that religious topics are treated differently, and set forth in various ways, by



divers minds according to their several habits of thought ; and the very distinction which is thereby to be noticed in their writings proves that they proceed forth from separate individuals, whose modes of thought are not alike.

It is however further advanced in favour of Gerson that there are many phrases, sentiments, and thoughts in the 'De Imitatione' which are very like to what are to be found in Gerson's various publications, and therefore this identity of language goes a great way, it is thought, to prove their origin to be the same. M. Gence, whose great aim throughout his life has been to prove that Gerson wrote the 'De Imitatione,' published a work called *Parallèle des Phrases de l'Imitation de J. C., et des passages tirés des œuvres morales de Gerson*, 1836, in which he labours hard to show this similarity of language ; and so has M. Vert also in his *Gersonia*, 1857. But in reply, it may be said that it is not difficult to meet with a certain degree of similarity of expression in different religious writers : and that what may be said of Gerson in this respect, might be said of many others also, and of some where the likeness was still nearer. This might easily be shown from the works of Fénelon or Pascal, and perhaps more so from St. Augustine or St. Chrysostom, if the like patience and industry were given to the effort in selecting passages as have been given to Gerson. Did time and space allow such a liberty,—but it would be too great a divergence from the main design of this book,—many passages, ideas, and precepts might be selected from these other named



authors, manifesting a marked likeness with what is found in the 'De Imitatione;' but we do not on this account try to prove that the 'De Imitatione' was written by any of them; neither ought we to imagine that this could be the case with Gerson, unless we had other important testimony to support such a supposition.

It would be well, however, for us to hear what is said upon this point, i.e. upon the similarity of writing between the works of Gerson and the 'De Imitatione,' by a few able men, well qualified to judge in such a matter, but who are not partisans of Gerson, or prejudiced as such in his favour.

M. Renan, confessedly a great French scholar, though holding sentiments inimical to Christianity, writes thus upon the question :—

"There is besides a strange contrast between the restless rugged scholastic, whose life was filled with so many encounters, and the peaceful man who wrote these pages of the 'De Imitatione,' full of sweetness and gentle simplicity. A man mixed up with all the struggles of his time would not be able to possess tones so fine and so penetrating. The man of politics preserves, even in his retreat, his habits of unquiet activity. There is a certain delicacy of conscience which is irrevocably tarnished by business, and one would scarcely find in the past a work so distinguished for moral sentiment which was the fruit of the leisure of a man so full of worldly interests. Gerson retired to the house of the Celestines at Lyons, but still continued to be engaged in all the quarrels of the age, and we know that his brother having asked him in his last days to compose a book for the community after the manner of a moral treatise drawn from Scripture, he was not able to finish it."

"Gerson, the dialectician *par excellence*,—Gerson, the enemy of religious orders, the adversary of the mystics,—how could his

soul, hardened by syllogisms, have found the sweet inspiration of the monastic life? What is more impossible? Let us add that the style of Gerson is a barbarism entirely scholastic; that of the 'De Imitatione' is not Latin, without doubt: but it is full of delight; it is a tongue which we must take as it is, not very classical, but admirably fitted to render the finest shades of the interior life and feeling."—*Études d'Histoire Religieuse*, pp. 322, 323.

M. Ellies Dupin also, who was much mixed up with the controversy in a previous generation, says:—

"Perhaps Gersen or Gessen are only corruptions of the name Gerson. Notwithstanding, there are two things which will hardly let us believe that this was Gerson's work; one, that the author calls himself a monk, the other, that the style of that book ('De Imitatione') is very different from that of the Chancellor of Paris."—*History of the Church*, vol. iii. p. 110.

Our own countryman, Dean Milman, also, no mean critic, says:—

"Several recent writers, especially M. Onésime Roy, *Études sur les Mystères*, have thought they have proved it (the 'De Imitatione') to be by the famous Gerson. If any judgment is to be formed from Gerson's other writings, the internal evidence is conclusive against him."—*Hist. of Latin Christianity*, vol. ix. p. 161, note.

More recently, a French author who has given much attention to the whole question, writes in these forcible terms:—

"The 'De Imitatione' breathes, from one end to the other, a sweetness, a gentleness, a patience, a self-forgetfulness; in one word, all the qualities of a peaceable and serene soul, which do not arise but from the regions of solitude, and from the ways of the spirit. . . . The works of Gerson, on the contrary, bear, in general, a character of inequality and harshness, which answers to the agitation and misfortunes of his life. In the writings of the Chancellor, which turn upon the essentials of piety and

spiritual life, one meets without doubt with remarkable passages where the finest sentiment is manifested, but too often these are roses in the midst of thorns, or as precious stones scattered upon a rocky soil. The spirit which habitually animates Gerson is not the spirit which habitually animates the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' And whoever has attentively read the spiritual works of the Chancellor will be convinced that his piety is not expressed in the language of this admirable book."

And again the same writer says :—

"Here are some traits which place a gulf between Gerson and the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' Affectation is the chief fault of Gerson; simplicity is the distinctive character of the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' Gerson loves complicated periods and incidental phrases; the author of the '*De Imitatione*,' on the contrary, has a terse style, and does not speak unless it be to say what it does by maxims and by oracles. Gerson is prolix and diffuse; the author of the '*De Imitatione*' is brief and concise. Gerson, for thought as for style, is often discursive and unequal,—as a river which sometimes moves slowly and sometimes precipitately; the author of the '*De Imitatione*' employs a style always equal and uniform as a limpid stream which flows over a smooth bed. Gerson speaks always of theory; the author of the '*De Imitatione*' speaks constantly of practice: in the one it is the mind which directs the pen, in the other it is the heart. Uction is very rare with Gerson, it is habitual in the book of the '*De Imitatione*.'"—Malou, *Recherches*, pp. 374, 375.

M. Faugère, who was called upon by the Academy of France to sing the praises of Gerson as laureate in 1836, while rejecting the rights of Gerson and of Thomas à Kempis, attributes the '*De Imitatione*' to his hero; but even he, a partisan and an advocate of Gerson's claim, cannot but allow that there is a difference of style between the works of Gerson and the '*De Imitatione*.' After affirming that in the style of

the book one recognises the pen of Gerson, he stops and says, "It is true that the *expression* of the 'De Imitatione,' always limpid and tender, is very far sometimes from being the style of Gerson, which is generally more severe and methodical, but one may find as beautiful in many passages of his other writings." The words are taken on the faith of M. Vert.<sup>1</sup>

Such are some of the remarks made by learned men upon the question as to what similarity there is between the works of Gerson and the 'De Imitatione.' They are so diametrically opposed to the opinion that any likeness can be found or traced between them, that we think the cause of Gerson only suffers by the point ever having been raised, and that it would have been better for him that the comparison had not been instituted.

Along with this point in the discussion, there is another to which attention should be directed, which militates considerably against the supposition that Gerson could be the author of the 'De Imitatione;' it is this,—to which a passing allusion was made at the commencement,—that the defenders of Gerson themselves speak with much uncertainty and hesitation as to the possibility of making good his claim. They do not proceed upon conviction: they have never dared formally to assert the claim of Gerson to be the author of the 'De Imitatione' as certain. M. Ellies Dupin terminates his researches by these lines of Terence:—

"Fecistis probe;  
Incertior sum multo quam dudum."

<sup>1</sup> *Études*, p. 237.

The words indicate many motives for doubting the rights of Gerson : for after all his investigations, and the discussions he has engaged in, relative to the matter, there is nothing alleged, as it appears to him, to be fully proved. The Abbé Secuy published in 1832 an essay on the life of Gerson, in two volumes 8vo; but he has not deigned to discuss the rights of his hero to the 'De Imitatione,' and only briefly alludes to it in passing.

M. Dupré, another laureate who was called upon by the Academy of France to deliver a panegyric on Gerson in 1836, dared not attribute the writing of the 'De Imitatione' to the Chancellor; he only observes in passing that some refused to him the honour, but that he was worthy to be the writer of it.<sup>1</sup>

M. Thomassy, in an article in the *Revue Contemp.*, 1853, sums up to some extent what he has intimated in his *Life of Gerson* with respect to his having written the 'De Imitatione:' "*The positive proofs fail us,*" he says, and confesses that his thesis is obscure (vol. iv. p. 309).

These instances, taken from a number of others, may suffice; but what impressions must they leave if not this, that the defenders of Gerson themselves are but little convinced of his right to the authorship—that they have their doubts about it! And surely these doubts must be increased—and well they may,—after the survey of the various proofs which have been suggested or brought forward by them in an attempt to bolster up an invalid title, which should never have been entered upon.

<sup>1</sup> Grégory, *Hist. de l'imit.* i. 335.



Moreover, this hesitation among the defenders of Gerson forms a singular contrast to the assurances of their opponents and to those of disinterested judges upon the question, who in positive terms deny that he has any right to the title. We have only to notice a few of these to be convinced that this is but a groundless attempt which has been made to foist the name of Gerson upon the public as the author of the '*De Imitatione*.'

From the year 1488, that is to say, to date from seventeen years after the death of Thomas à Kempis unto the first year of the seventeenth century, all the editors of the works of the Chancellor repeat that Gerson is *not* the author of the '*De Imitatione*,' and that this book is by a certain author well known, who is Thomas à Kempis. This testimony has so much the greater force, since it is delivered in an eulogy of Gerson.<sup>1</sup> It is strange that the recent defender of Gerson did not take this important fact into consideration. This silence is the more astonishing, as M. Vert himself boasts that he possessed a very fine copy of the works of Gerson, published in 1488.<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, in 1493, the editor of the French translation of the '*De Imitatione*' published in Paris, declares that some persons had attributed this book to Master Gerson, although it was found to be otherwise.<sup>3</sup>

About the same period, Jean Mauburne, a pious and learned writer of the house of St. Agnes, declared

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Gersonia*, p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, *Hist. du liv. de l'imit.*, i. 237.



in France, where Gerson chiefly lived, that *many falsely attributed the 'De Imitatione' to him.*<sup>1</sup>

George Pirckamer, the editor of the works of Thomas à Kempis, published at Nuremberg in 1494, says that the vulgar ignorant *wrongfully attributed* the book of the 'De Imitatione' to Gerson. Could any one cite a single author of the fifteenth century who has said that the 'De Imitatione' has been wrongfully attributed to Thomas à Kempis?

Dom Valgrave, who combated the matter in 1650 for Gerson, would not occupy himself with Gerson's claim, because he declared that his cause was absolutely lost and totally abandoned.<sup>2</sup>

M. Ellies Dupin, who pleaded the cause of the Chancellor, would not insert the 'De Imitatione' in the magnificent edition of the complete works of Gerson, given in 1705. It is alleged by the supporters of Gerson, that the motive for this determination was, that there was no use in reproducing a work so generally known. This, however, is a bad defect, for as he does not omit such works of Gerson as are generally well known, there must be some other reason; and what more likely than after having heard the debate about the 'De Imitatione' he should have come to the conclusion that however much he admired the Chancellor, this excellent work was not by him, or that it was to his mind very doubtful, and he therefore omitted it?

The celebrated Dr. Cave wrote, toward the end of the seventeenth century, that the opinion favourable

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Deduct. Crit.*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Argum. Chronol.*, p. 125.

to Gerson had long since been banished by the savans.<sup>1</sup>

Father Desbillons, who examined in 1780, with some severity and criticism, the question under discussion, thinks that he ought not to occupy himself with Gerson, because it is recognised, says he, "*that the book has not been written by Gerson. All the critics,*" continues he, "*hold this fact for certain and well proved. Since nobody disputes it, we will dispense with treating upon a question which would be useless.*"<sup>2</sup>

M. Charles Schmidt, in his essay upon Gerson, published at Strasburg, 1839, formally denies that Gerson composed the book of the '*De Imitatione*' (p. 121).

M. Veratti says, "One can only allege in his favour the obstinacy and desire of his partisans."<sup>3</sup>

But enough; it can without exaggeration be said, that after more than three centuries, the learned are unanimous in refusing to Gerson the right which eight or ten writers have tried to make the best of without convincing any one. If they had been able to produce any serious argument in his favour, the cause of the Chancellor would not have remained in the state of neglect in which we have already seen it. Mgr. Malou says, the last defenders of Gerson have not been able to produce a single new argument which the learned men we have cited have not been able to meet.<sup>4</sup>

Before we conclude the case of Gerson, we would

<sup>1</sup> "Verum ea sententia dudum apud eruditos exulavit."—*Hist. Lit. ad ann.* 1470. *Thom. Kemp.*, ii. 165; *Basil*, 1745.

<sup>2</sup> Desbillons, *Diapad. Crit.*, p. 31; *Manheim*, 1790.

<sup>3</sup> Barth Veratti, *Opusculi Religiosi*, p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> *Recherches*, p. 362.

observe that Mgr. Malou in his third edition of the *Recherches*, published in 1858, says :—

“ The cause of Gerson, which had been abandoned for a long time, when I published the second edition of these *Recherches*, has suddenly found zealous and ardent defenders. I would not dare to say the cause has gained in strength, in probability ; for they have not produced, that I know of, any new document ; they have not discovered any new fact that was favourable to the Chancellor ; they have not occupied themselves seriously with the grave difficulties, or the reasons, which are decisive in our eyes, that we have opposed to the defenders of Gerson ; one is thrown into a path without any end of conjectures, without any likelihood of coming nearer the truth, of hypotheses and gratuitous affirmations which contribute powerfully to embroil and prolong a discussion of literary criticism ; but which will never serve to clear it up or to resolve it. . . . In surveying the facts and reasons, we are forced to the belief that the name of Gerson ought never to have figured in this controversy. Never have they (his partisans) been able to produce a single clear, incontestable reason in his favour ; never have they been able to allege a *single proof of a fact* for him ; never have they been able to destroy or combat, with any appearance of success, one or the other of the material facts which overthrow his cause, nor the peremptory reasons which oblige us to repulse his rights. Those who allow themselves to be dazzled by the number of reasons which are shown might be bewitched by them, but those who weigh them will, after having read them, be less persuaded by them than ever.”—*Recherches*, pp. 295, 296.

Everything then fails to support the cause of Gerson. For him there is no tradition ; no contemporaneous witnesses ; no manuscripts dated before his death, nor any for some time after ; no citations of the book under his name, although the Chancellor was very well known, and the book was remarkable ; no mention of the book in the authentic catalogues of his works ; and, on the contrary, we find (1.) the ground-

work and form of the book which they attributed to him to be against him ; (2.) the testimony of his editors, who refuse to him the 'De Imitatione,' and attributed it to Thomas à Kempis ; (3.) then the doubts of his admirers ; (4.) and lastly, the conviction of the learned, who are unanimously hostile to him. Moreover, the new proofs, which a few suppose they have discovered, are repudiated by his own partisans.

What can we say then, but this, that "there is nothing for Gerson ; all is against him ; his cause has been adjudged and lost" !

### PART III.

#### THE CLAIMS OF THOMAS À KEMPIS TO BE THE AUTHOR.

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

*Objections answered. The first Contemporary  
witness examined.*

TO overthrow the pretensions made in behalf of other individuals to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione,' and to show that they never had any real title to it, does not of itself establish the claims of Thomas à Kempis, unless we view it in the same light as we do that of property, and determine the question in a similar manner; and then, his having been in possession of the title originally, and his never having been fairly dispossessed of it since,—notwithstanding the many persons to which the authorship of it has been assigned, and the fierce and protracted contentions that have been made on behalf of two of them especially,—is of itself an argument in his favour, inasmuch as it is an evidence of his being the rightful owner to the title, until it can be fairly shown that it belongs to another: for thus we judge respecting any estate concerning which there has been some dispute.

If it could have been substantially proved that some one person or other had really written the 'De Imitatione,' if sufficient evidence had been brought forward to show that any certain individual had a good title to it, and that this evidence had been thoroughly sifted, examined, and adjudged to be valid, then there would have been an effectual bar to the claims made in behalf of Thomas à Kempis, or, to say the least, his claims to it would ever afterwards have remained doubtful. For if any one else could be clearly shown to be the author, then Thomas à Kempis could not have written the book, he could only have copied it. But until this can be proved, until it can be shown that some other individual has composed this celebrated work, Thomas à Kempis remains in possession of the title to it. And, moreover, the complete overthrow of the several suits made to secure the title for some one person or the other leaves a clear and open field for him; for there is no one else that can now establish any claim to it, if Thomas à Kempis can not.

But we do not rest the cause of Thomas à Kempis upon his having been so long in possession of the title, though it may be well to show, as we proceed, how this circumstance should have its due weight, even amidst the sharp contests which have been made to deprive him of the right; we shall endeavour to produce incontestable evidence in support of Thomas à Kempis being the author,—evidence that will afford a striking contrast to that which has been advanced in favour of the two other claimants, Gerson and Gersen,—evidence of such a weighty and substantial character



can rarely be produced to establish the claims of an author to any work, written so long a time ago.

We would notice, however, in the first place, some of the main objections that have been brought, in this country, against the fact of Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione.' The writer of an article in the *Christian Remembrancer* for A.D. 1835, on "The Mystic Theology of Holland," has endeavoured to give a brief epitome of them, to show that Thomas was not the author. We cannot but notice them therefore, and try to remove the doubt and disbelief which they have inspired. And we do this, because many persons in England to this day have been led to conclude, from what he says, that Thomas à Kempis did not write the 'De Imitatione,' or, at least, that it is a matter of great doubt, and one about which it is impossible to gain any satisfactory evidence whereupon to form a sound judgment. The writer says:—

"It is beyond our design to enter at length into the question, whether the 'Imitation' has been rightly ascribed to him" (Thomas à Kempis).

And then, a little while after, he adds:—

"It is now, however, almost a settled point among ecclesiastical scholars that Thomas was not its author. The arguments against his claim are briefly these:—

"1. The simple fact that the only reason for ascribing it to him consists in the epigraph, 'Finished and completed in the year of our Lord 1441, by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, of the monastery of Mount Saint Agnes, near Zwolle.' The same man might make him the author of the Bible itself.

"2. The account given by his contemporaries, that in writing the 'Imitation' Thomas employed the most ancient MSS. he could find.

"3. The fact that, in the very rare Editio Princeps of the works of Thomas, printed by Keteleer, about 1475, and edited by the brothers of his own order, the 'Imitation' is not to be found.

"4. Nor is it to be found in any Dutch edition for fifty years after.

"5. It is said in Holland,—and the assertion has never been contradicted,—that M. Van Vree, President of the College at Warmound, has fragments of the 'Imitation' in Flemish, written in the fourteenth century.

"6. Any one who will study the undoubted works of Thomas—'The Valley of Lilies,' 'The Book of the Three Tabernacles,' 'The Sermons to the Novices'—will be morally convinced that he did not write the 'Imitation.' The style is as different as is that of St. Bernard from St. Augustine. And the quotations that he makes from the 'Imitation' prove the same thing. Who ever thus quoted his own works?"

More important objections than these, it must be allowed, have been already advanced and answered; and there are others to which we shall reply as we proceed; but we shall, as we have promised, endeavour to give a brief answer to these objections, to disabuse at once the minds of those who have been influenced by them, and to show them in a few words, before we pass on, that there is little weight or force in them, and that they need not be considered as forming any great obstacle in the way of establishing the claims of Thomas à Kempis.

Notice then, that the writer of the article does not pretend to have examined the question in any adequate manner, or to have given much attention to it; he merely sums up the main objections which he has gathered from what he has read against Thomas à Kempis being the author, and then gravely intimates

at, among the learned, it is well-nigh concluded that cannot have composed it. It is evident from the very words that the writer of the article can only have gained a very imperfect idea of the matter, and that a one-sided one, as will be clearly apparent when we come to meet the objections he has collected together: and it is difficult to conceive how any one who has given any attention to the controversies which have been carried on about the authorship of the '*De Imitatione*' for so many generations, can be for one moment misled by them, or led to imagine that they form a barrier to the claims of Thomas à Kempis.

(1.) In reply to the first objection, we simply deny that the epigraph of Thomas à Kempis on the manuscript dated 1441 is the only reason,—and, as it will abundantly proved, is very far from being the only reason,—why Thomas à Kempis is considered to be the author of the '*De Imitatione*,' for very many proofs can be adduced in his favour; and most of them of far greater value than this is imagined to be. It is true that the Bible which Thomas à Kempis wrote out, had a sign-manual at the end, as the testimony that it was copied by him, just in like manner to that in the manuscript copy of the '*De Imitatione*' dated 1441; and if this fact stood alone, it might be argued, with some appearance of reason, that as Thomas à Kempis was a copier, and could be only the copier or transcriber of the Bible, so he had been of the '*De Imitatione*' also. But it is well known that Thomas à Kempis was an author also, and that he wrote many other devotional treatises, or little books of a similar character to the '*De*

Imitatione.' And what more likely than that he should copy out again and again his own works, which he felt might prove so exceedingly useful to other earnest souls? Moreover, there are several circumstances connected with this manuscript copy of the 'De Imitatione' that will be brought forward in the proper place, which afford evidence of his having been the author.

(2.) We have not yet met with the statement, or any intimation of it given by the contemporaries of Thomas à Kempis, that in writing the 'De Imitatione' he employed the most ancient manuscripts he could find. And there is no authority given to trace out the origin of this objection. Some allusion may be made to his copying other works than his own in earlier years, but it is quite a gratuitous supposition to make it apply to the 'De Imitatione;' as evidence is forthcoming to prove the contrary; for it can be shown that the work underwent revision by him before it attained its exact present condition.

(3, 4.) The not finding the 'De Imitatione' in some of the editions of the works of Thomas à Kempis weighs very little against his claim to be the writer, because there are a far larger number of the editions of his works wherein the 'De Imitatione' is printed; and as it is well known that the 'De Imitatione' was printed by itself more frequently than in connection with his other works, and was multiplied to a larger extent, there would be found those who, possessing the 'De Imitatione' in a separate book, would prefer to have the other works of Thomas à Kempis without it; and therefore it might be found expedient to meet

the tastes and wishes of some such as these by not printing the 'De Imitatione' in every edition. Moreover, these editions, as we have shown, ought not to count for much, unless there are some peculiar circumstances which may severally give them some special value. If the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis, says Malou in the Preface to the second edition of his *Recherches*, had examined the volume of this edition (the very rare *Editio Princeps* of the works of Thomas à Kempis printed by N. Keteleer), they would have read there that the editor did not wish to give anything but a *selection* of the treatises of this writer. It is evident from what is said, that it was *not* designed to give a *complete edition* of the works of Thomas à Kempis. They were able to omit the 'De Imitatione,' because it was then in the hands of nearly every devout person. In the most ancient of all the editions, as we shall show, the *Editio Princeps* of Ginther Zainer, printed at Augsburg in 1468, we there find the 'De Imitatione.'

(5.) We have already shown that little faith is to be attached to even more perfect manuscripts of the 'De Imitatione,' said to have been written in the fifteenth century (much less to those in the fourteenth), than the fragmentary one here alluded to, which is after all referred to merely upon hearsay; and it is hardly worth contradicting this objection in the face of more formidable obstacles, which have been advanced and overcome.

(6.) One is almost amazed at the unhesitating positiveness with which judgment is given as to the



diversity of style that is said to exist between the 'De Imitatione' and the other works of Thomas à Kempis. And we ask,—*Where* does he quote the 'De Imitatione' in any of his other works, as intimated? No one has ever produced from his other works a direct quotation from the 'De Imitatione.' There is a similarity of sentiment, we grant, but this is just what is here denied him. We shall have to take this matter up again, however, and we would here only now give the opinion of a well-known English author, who was fully qualified to speak upon such a point, and who, from his way of doing so, had evidently considered the subject. Milman, in his *History of Latin Christianity*, has a note to this effect:—

"M. Michelet has some quotations from Thomas à Kempis, the author at least of a thick volume published under that name, which might seem equally to endanger his claim. But to me, though inferior, the other devotional works there ascribed to Thomas à Kempis,—the *Soliloquium Animæ*, the *Hortulus Asarum*, and *Vallis Liliorum*, even the Sermons,—if not quite so pure, are more than kindred, absolutely the same in thought, language, and style. See the *Opera T. à Kempis*: Antwerp, 1515." Vol. ix. pp. 161, 162.

This repudiation of the objections to Thomas à Kempis may be permitted to stand then, in opposition to the judgment passed upon this question by the reviewer in the *Christian Remembrancer*, till we consider suchlike objections in their proper place more at length.

We shall now endeavour to establish the right of Thomas à Kempis to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione' by several means,—by direct proofs, by substantial facts, by the witness of contemporaries, by the



condition of the manuscripts, by the inscriptions of the most ancient editions, which have some special circumstances to give a weight to their testimony,—by the form and structure of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ itself, and by the doctrines it includes. After having developed these positive proofs, we shall then return to answer some of the remaining objections, so as to remove, as far as possible, the very shadow of a doubt of his being the real author.

Our attention must first be given to the evidence arising from CONTEMPORANEOUS WITNESSES.

The value of this testimony is of the highest importance, and of all proofs it is the strongest in substantiating such a claim as the present. When we can bring forward several eye-witnesses—men whose word is worthy of credit, who were well informed and highly respected—to attest a fact, about which there was no dispute in their time, there seems no longer room to doubt the reality of what is admitted as indubitable. And this we are able to do. We have ocular witnesses, who have seen the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ leave the hands of Thomas à Kempis—who have attributed this book to him forty years before his death,—who have published it under his name,—who have claimed it as the work of their brother and friend, though he was not anxious to become famous by its being known as his; and, moreover, for one hundred and fifty years after the death of Thomas à Kempis, the ‘*De Imitatione*’ was almost universally received as his, and no controversy had arisen to dispute his claim; though, through errors

and guesses of copyists and printers, it had been attributed to other individuals.

And the importance of this testimony is the further enhanced when we take into consideration this fact, that the partisans of Gersen and Gerson—the two most formidable competitors of Thomas à Kempis—have not been able to bring one single contemporaneous witness in support of one or the other. One of the defenders of Gerson promised to do so, and tried to do so; but when he came to give proof of it, he miserably failed. One of the witnesses he adduced lived nearly one hundred and fifty years after the death of Gerson; and another, though not so late, is a witness for Thomas à Kempis as well as Gerson, and therefore is of no value in favour of one or the other. What then, they were not able to do in either one or the other case,—i.e. to bring forward any witness living in the times of these supposed authors of the '*De Imitatione*,'—the supporters of the cause of Thomas are able to do.

There are then in favour of Thomas à Kempis decisive, historical, incontestable proofs furnished by his friends and the Brethren of the Order to which he belonged. And here are the witnesses:—

(1.) The *first* we shall bring forward is that of JOHN BUSCHIUS, who was born in the year 1400, and who made his religious profession in 1420, in the monastery of the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine at Windesheim, which is not further than a league from the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, where Thomas à Kempis was Sub-Prior at the time. Buschius, by his

extensive knowledge and his piety, deservedly acquired the regard of Cardinal de Cusa, who chose him for his co-visitor when he undertook, in the quality of Apostolic Nuncio, the reform of the monasteries of Lower Germany. This pious and religious savant died in 1479, eight years after the death of Thomas à Kempis, of whom he had been the friend and brother during the whole of his life. In the year 1464, seven years before the death of Thomas à Kempis, Buschius finished the Chronicles of his Order, and in describing the death of John Van Huesden, Canon of Windesheim, which took place in the year 1424, he says, in book ii. chap. 21 :—

“ It happened a few days before he died, that two notable brothers from Mount St. Agnes, of our Order, arrived at Windesheim to consult with our afore-named Prior upon certain matters, one of whom, Brother Thomas à Kempis, an excellent man, who has composed many devout books, viz., *Qui sequitur me, De Imitatione Christi*, with others, saw, while sleeping the night following, a presage of future events.”

Buschius adds that Thomas à Kempis comprehended in this dream the announcement of the next death to be that of Jean Van Huesden, and that he made known his vision to the clerk who accompanied him.<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, we have a most important witness to the very facts respecting which we are desiring evidence. A near neighbour of Thomas à Kempis, who

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 34, 35. The words as given by Amort are—“Contigit ante paucos dies sui obitus, ut duo fratres notabiles de Monte Agnetis prope Swollis Ordinis nostri dictum priorem nostrum super certis rebus consultari in Windesheim advenirent, quorum unus Frater Thomas à Kempis vir probata vita, qui plures devotos libellos composuit, videlicet, *Qui sequitur me, De Imitatione Christi*, cum aliis, nocte insecuta somnium vidit, praeagium futurorum.”

knows him well, who has conversed with him, who was living in the same house where he came on a visit, who speaks of Thomas as a brother, the most notable of his Order, records a fact, without hesitation, which makes this brother celebrated, and this fact is, that he has written the '*De Imitatione*,' and was the author of it. He puts down in his history this fact as a matter about which there is or can be no question, because it was well known. He relates this fact in the presence of Thomas à Kempis, whilst living,—to the friends of Thomas, who could have given it the lie if it had not been true, and to the superiors of the Order, who would not have tolerated a falsehood on such a matter.

It must also be remembered that the '*De Imitatione*' had not then acquired the celebrity which it obtained later, and that Buschius attributed this book to Thomas à Kempis without any controversial design, or any desire of vainglory, and at a time when nobody contested with Thomas his rights as author.

This testimony is no doubt very decisive. Indeed, so decisive has it been considered, that the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis, feeling that it alone would totally overthrow all their efforts, have endeavoured to destroy, or bring into question, its authenticity in several ways. The Chronicle of Windesheim, they say, has been interpolated by a recent hand, who has inserted other words in the precious testimony. But this assertion has had no success. The Gersenists have stated that the words '*De Imitatione Christi*' are not found in the text, and are not found in the autograph Chronicle

of Buschius. But we would observe, that supposing it were true that these words did not exist in the Windesheim Chronicle, the words *Qui sequitur me*, with which the book of the 'De Imitatione' begins, would be quite sufficient to prove our point. But what the Gersenists assert is found, upon a thorough examination, before competent and credible witnesses, to be very far from the truth; for the allegation was fully and amply rebutted in the year 1681, before the learned men assembled in Paris who were commissioned to examine into the matters connected with the authorship of the 'De Imitatione;' and it was shown that the Gersenists were nowise justified in making such a gross misrepresentation of the matter. M. Dupin, in tom. xii. sec. 5 of his *Bibl. Eccles. Diss.*, gives an account of the discussion; from which it appears that the assertion of the Gersenists was wholly false when Buschius's Chronicle came to be laid before the judges. The Canons-Regular produced two manuscripts of the Chronicle by Buschius. One of these was a copy of the Chronicle written out at the celebrated monastery of Rebdorff, in Bavaria, in the year 1477, by the hand of John Offenburg, and therefore whilst Buschius was still alive, and the very words alluded to appear in regular order in the writing.<sup>1</sup> The other manuscript was the copy written by Buschius himself, during the lifetime of Thomas à Kempis, and in this also the words called in question are found without any appearance of interpolation. It is perfectly certain also that the Canons-Regular never

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, pp. 149-152.



entertained a doubt about the words having been written by Buschius himself in his own Chronicle; as Mulinetus wrote in a letter to his friend in 1687, wherein he submits it to be a matter indisputably settled by Simon in his *Bibliotheca Critica*, tom. i. cap. 2.<sup>1</sup>

After a time, the insinuation about the interpolation of Buschius's Chronicle was again repeated; then R. P. Th. Bosman, Prior of the Convent of St. Martin of the Congregation of Windesheim, at Lovain, possessor of the greater part of the manuscripts of the Convent of St. Agnes, had the words quoted by us from the autograph manuscript of Buschius attested in 1760 by the notary Eyckermans, in the presence of many witnesses; and after quoting the passage, the attestation is given as follows: "These words compared with the autograph have been found written by the same hand, in the same kind of letters, with the same ink, in the same context, in the same lines, without any erasure, without the suppression of a single word, without parenthesis."<sup>2</sup>

M. Mooren, in *Nachrichten über Thoma à Kemp.*

<sup>1</sup> Vide Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Bosman, *mas.*, fol. p. 431. See also Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 93.

Here are the terms in which R. P. Bosman recounts the affair: "Cum denuo dissensio aborta esset inter Canonicos Regulares et DD. Benedictinos, an Von. Thomas noster à Kempis auctor esset auri libelli, 'Qui sequitur me,' etc., scripsit ad me erudit. D. Eus. Amort, C. R. Pollinger in superiori Bavaria, ut authenticum submitterem instrumentum ex Buschio nostro, qui in Bibliotheca nostra servatur, quod ea quæ sequuntur verba eadem manu, eisdem litteris, eodem atramento, eadem in litura et sine ulla prorsus mutatione habeantur." Here occur the words of Buschius, which have been quoted, and then these:—"Quod quidem instrumentum manu notarii petri Eyckermans, Lovanii residentis exaratum, et per secretarium Lovanensem legalizatum ac sigillo civitatis munitum, cum eadem D. mine Eusebio Amort submissem, scripsit ad me," etc.—*Chron. Martin. Can. Reg. St. Aug. Lovan.*



14, declares that he had in his hands, in the year 1644, a manuscript of the Chronicle of Buschius, dated 1444, which includes the remarkable passage that has been called in question. Here, then, most fortunately, we have three contemporaneous manuscripts comprising the autograph, in perfect accord; so there appears no room for doubt, notwithstanding M. Vert has again lately revived the accusation of interpolation. It is vain to argue with those who reject all evidence which is against them, however valid it may be!

Pushed to their last entrenchments, the Gersenists are reduced to say, with Master Delfau, that Buschius deceived himself—that he made a mistake—and that he should pardon his error: but is not this to say that Buschius did not know what he wrote—that he acted without judgment or criticism facts glorious to his Order, and that he transmitted them to posterity without any uneasiness about their reality? The allegation is, however, simply a conjecture, which, upon its face of it, has its origin in the breasts or desires of the opponents of Thomas à Kempis, and consequently cannot be suffered to have place for a moment. As to the worth of the Chronicle of Buschius, Leibnitz judged otherwise. "This Chronicle," says he, in the preface to the *Collection des Historiens de Brunswick*, "in which some have done wrong to despise, includes many useful things to throw light upon the history of the provinces of Germany. There may be seen there what abuses were introduced into the monasteries of the times, but it may be seen there also, that the licence and corruption was much less than was com-

monly supposed. It is manifest that Buschius did not dissemble the abuses, and did not flatter his own Order."<sup>1</sup>

M. de Grégory is more feeble than Delfau. He opposes to the testimony of Buschius the silence that this author observes in another passage of his history. "At the commencement of his Chronicle," M. de Grégory says, "Buschius praised the two brothers John and Thomas à Kempis; he boasts of their skill in the writing out of their manuscripts, and he does not pronounce a single word which has any relation to the book of the '*De Imitatione*.'"<sup>2</sup>

But to this unfair deduction it is replied, "Because Buschius has said nothing of the '*De Imitatione*' at the commencement of his Chronicle, does it follow as good logic that he has advanced a falsehood in saying towards the middle of the book that Thomas à Kempis has composed this celebrated work? We do not see the connection of these two ideas; but what is very clear to us is, that the Gersenists, to annihilate the testimony of Buschius, are reduced to affirm boldly

<sup>1</sup> Tom. ii., No. 30, p. 45.

Here are the terms in which Buschius speaks of himself: "*Ego in virtutibus omnium novissimus, licet corde tepido, aggrediar conscribere ea quæ coram positus oculis ipse conspexi, aut a meis majoribus frequentius audiui, aut a generali nostro Capitulo determinata cognovi. Omnes enim fratres in Windesem conventuales, a fundationis sue principio ipse vidi et cognovi, demptis duntaxat quatuor, qui ante me ibidem in Christo dormierunt, ut omnes, dempto uno, quos ibi inveni, ad regna celestia jam nunc, cum hæc describo, me dudum præcesserunt.*" In the preface to the *Chron. Windes.* it is intimated that he is sixty years old; that he has been forty years a "religious;" that he was known at Windesheim for fifty years; that he rejoiced at the prodigious increase of modern devotion, which commenced eighty-six years ago by some poor servants of Jesus Christ, despised by the world; and that it is now propagated in more than fifty monasteries of different Orders, and among the "Tertiaires" of St. Francis, "tertiares" of both sexes, forming more than a hundred congregations or houses.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. du livre de l'Imit.*, tom. i. pp. 231, 297.

something contrary to an established fact,—to depreciate a history that the most celebrated writers esteem; to propose negative arguments which would make a child smile.”<sup>1</sup> The ablest opponents of Thomas à Kempis have then been unable to shake, or in any way invalidate the testimony of Buschius in his favour.

<sup>1</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, p. 81.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### *Contemporaneous Witnesses for Thomas à Kempis continued.*

THOUGH there is abundance of other testimony to produce in favour of Thomas à Kempis as the author of the 'De Imitatione,' it is of more importance thoroughly to prove the authenticity of a few witnesses than to produce a large number where the facts are only loosely supported, or which do not carry sufficient weight with them; for this reason we have not hesitated to show how the evidence of Buschius has been tested and sifted in every possible way; for if it can be perfectly established it will of itself be sufficient to secure the claim of Thomas à Kempis. This evidence alone, we conceive, would carry the day before an impartial tribunal. The sifting and testing of the evidence, like the testing of a cable, only shows its great power and strength, when it cannot be broken after a severe strain has been put upon it. The opponents of Thomas à Kempis have tried their utmost to shake the validity of this testimony, but have been utterly unable to damage it in the least. And there is another view, which we should notice as we proceed,—the very

weakness and groundlessness of their objections only show, that after all their efforts and researches, after the most minute examinations of the manuscripts, and considering in every possible way how they could render void the evidence, the testimony in support of the claims of Thomas à Kempis cannot be overthrown, but remain impregnable against all assaults.

There is a simplicity and naturalness about the recital of Buschius that seems to carry with it a conviction of the truth of what relates to Thomas à Kempis. It was a singular event in the history of his monastery, that the death of its Prior, John Van Huesden, should have been foreseen and foretold. There is always something mysterious about such revelations, and people are apt to be suspicious about the truth of them. What, then, more likely than that Buschius should name the individual who had thus foreseen the death of their Prior, and, to give greater credibility to the story of the vision, than that he should speak of Thomas as "a man of approved life, and as the individual who had composed the book of the '*De Imitatione*'"? If it had not been for the vision, we might never have heard of Thomas à Kempis from Buschius, or of his being the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' It was for supporting the story of the vision about the death of the Prior that we hear of Thomas à Kempis and his being the author of the '*De Imitatione*;' and not for the sake of Thomas à Kempis and the '*De Imitatione*' that the vision is told. Buschius lived not more than a good morning's walk from Mount St. Agnes, where Thomas à Kempis lived; he must there-

fore have personally known Thomas even before this visit that Thomas paid to Windesheim, and been in a position to know well that he really was the author of the 'De Imitatione.' If it had not been true that Thomas à Kempis was the author of the 'De Imitatione,' would not Buschius have been informed of this, and corrected his Chronicle? Thomas à Kempis lived many years after the passage relating to him was written—that is, in 1424, whilst he lived to the year 1471, about forty-seven years after; and he was not the man to go about with honours that belonged to another man, and would have informed Buschius of his error had he been incorrect; or, if he had not, was it not very probable that some of the other brethren of the Order, either at Mount St. Agnes or at Windesheim, would have somehow informed him of the mistake he had made if there had been one; and Buschius would have rectified it. But Buschius did not, and there was evidently no need of it; for what he had stated must have been true. For suppose none of his Order had informed him of the error, or if they had conspired together with him to forge a lie,—which was not a probable thing among those striving to live near to God,—would not some others outside—some of their opponents or enemies,—of which they had not a few,—have convicted them of propagating a falsehood, and brought it up against them, or against Buschius, in some way or other; and would not the Gersenists, who afterwards so fiercely opposed the claim of Thomas, have been ready, and sure to bring such an objection forward if there had been the very shred of a rumour



for them to take hold of? But they did not, and could not, for there was not a vestige to be found to throw discredit upon the Chronicle of Buschius relative to Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione.'

Moreover, a remarkable coincidence seems to arise between this testimony and that of the *oldest dated* manuscript, with the name of Thomas à Kempis; whereby one greatly strengthens the other. For it will be seen that this ancient manuscript was copied from another which was deposited, as it would appear, at this very monastery of Windesheim, concerning which the Chronicle is made. And as the manuscript is dated 1425, the other manuscript from which it was copied must in all probability have been there in 1424, the very year in which Buschius records his testimony—if not before, and thus proves that he must have had an intimate knowledge of what he wrote about.

This testimony of Buschius, then, notwithstanding the ordeal it has passed through, is of great weight, and fully establishes the claim of Thomas à Kempis, being the evidence of a contemporary witness, which cannot be gainsaid.

Buschius's evidence, however, is not the only one, though it is so conclusive.

(2.) There are several other contemporary witnesses, and the next mentioned by Amort in his *Scutum Kempense* is one who calls himself BROTHER HERMAN. He was born in 1408, and entered the monastery of Wittenbrock in 1427, at the age of nineteen. In 1447 he was sent to the monastery "Novi

Operis," near Halle, where he shone for his piety and his learning.<sup>1</sup> Now a work of his was found in a codex manuscript in the College of the Canons-Regular at St. Nicholas, Passavia, in Bavaria; it contains various little works by the same hand, and among other things there is a description of the several members of the community of Windesheim, in which account Herman writes thus—

"The brother who has compiled the books of the 'De Imitatione' is called Thomas; he is Sub-Prior in the aforesaid monastery of Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle, in the diocese of Utrecht in the province of Cologne; and this monastery is only a league distant from Windesheim, which is the superior monastery in which the Canons-Regular of the province of Cologne, of Mayence, and of Treves hold every year a general chapter. This compiler lived still in 1454, and I, brother Herman of the monastery of 'Novi Operis,' near Halle, in the diocese of Magdeburg, being sent in the same year to the aforesaid general chapter, have spoken to him."

And to make this testimony more sure, Amort states that he has had the account given as it is found in the Manuscript Codex certified by the formal instrument of a public notary.<sup>2</sup>

Now, what are the simple facts here advanced? Seventeen years before the death of Thomas à Kempis a brother of the same confraternity, living in a distant monastery, saw him, and held intercourse with him himself on the occasion of his having been sent to a general chapter of the Order, which was assembled at Windesheim, and at which Thomas à Kempis was

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, p. 49. He is here called Herman Ryd.

<sup>2</sup> *Scutum Kempense*, p. 36.

present, with many others; and from any of these inquiry might be further made respecting the matter, which might be depended upon; for at that time, remember, the question of authorship was not disputed, and this Brother Herman positively asserts that Thomas, the Sub-Prior of the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, about a league distant from where the chapter assembled, was the writer of the '*De Imitatione*.' And lest this testimony might be questioned in any way as inaccurate, a learned man in the last century had it certified by a public notary.

It is impossible to suppose here either a lie or a mistake. The witness, a contemporary for many years with Thomas à Kempis, was well qualified to obtain accurate information; he records the testimony about the '*De Imitatione*' having been written by Thomas, among a number of other historical and biographical accounts; and if it had been untrue, there were those around who would have been ready to contradict the statement; neither can we imagine that Thomas himself—as in the former instance—would have suffered such a matter to be recorded respecting himself if it had not been true. Would he not the more likely have admonished the writer of his error, and begged him to correct it? Or were there none of all the Canons-Regular of Lower Germany that assembled at the General Chapter that could have rectified the error, if there had been one? Many of them were doubtless well acquainted with Thomas, and others would have the opportunity of inquiring about the fact; for it was a question not unlikely to be talked

about by the members of such an assembly, in their leisure moments ; and some allusions would doubtless be made to Thomas as the author of the ' *De Imitatione*.' That Thomas himself, then, never told any one that the statement was wrong,—that no one ever contradicted the statement,—that the enemies of Thomas à Kempis have not been able to produce the slightest intimation as to a doubt about the truth of this testimony, is, upon the very face of it, an evident token that it was not false,—that it could not be contradicted,—that it was a true statement which had been made,—that Thomas à Kempis was the veritable writer of the ' *De Imitatione*.'

(3.) MATHIAS FARINATOR, a religious friar of Augsburg, of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, is our next contemporary witness. He transcribed with his own hands the four books of the ' *De Imitatione*,' and attributed them to Thomas à Kempis. He made this copy most probably in 1472, but if not, in 1475, for the *Codex* contains both these dates. The first book of the ' *De Imitatione*,' however, it must be observed, is entirely taken out of the *Codex*. There is nevertheless an index of the contents of the treatises contained in the *Codex*; and this Eusebius Amort saw with his own eyes, and that it had been attested by those in authority after this manner :—*First part. The treatise of Thomas à Kempis, Canon-Regular of Mount St. Agnes, on the Imitation of Christ the Lord.* We have said that the former of the two dates (1472) was the most probable, and for this reason, that after the earlier treatises, where

the books of the 'De Imitatione' are founded in the *Codex*, the date 1472 is given, and it is only at the end of the last of the treatises that we find the date 1475.<sup>1</sup> And thus we may fairly conclude that this contemporary witness transcribed the book of the 'De Imitatione' only one year after the death of Thomas à Kempis, to whom he attributes the authorship. Thus an individual living during the life of Thomas attests that the 'De Imitatione' was written by him.

This testimony also has been considered so weighty that the adversaries of Thomas have taken some exception to it. D. Delfau supposes, after Possevin and Semler, that Mathias Farinator was born in 1300, and was the friend of John XXII., and therefore was too early to be a contemporary of Thomas à Kempis. These two writers are, however, mistaken, as is proved by the evidence of Father Testelette.<sup>2</sup> The error of Semler, he says, arises from this ambiguous note which he reads in the transcript of the *Moralités*, copied by M. Farinator :—"Hunc librum Moralitatum a M. Farinatore editum anno 1477, jussu Joannis XXII. pontificis maximi, *Lumen animæ* dictum est." It is said that this book, copied in 1477 by Farinator, was called *The Light of the Soul* by order of John XXII.

<sup>1</sup> *Notum Kempnæ*, pp. 27, 28. Arnott's words are : "In hoc Codice continentur varia opuscula. Primum erat quondam liber de Imitatione. Secundum est Philobiblon Richardi ; tertium, S. Chrysostomi tractatus de Iteparatione Lapsi. Scripti autem sunt manu Mathie Farinatoris 1472. Unum Codicis opusculum est Hugonis scriptum 1475. Primus verò liber de Imitatione est totus excisus e codice. Sed fur oblitus est excindere præterea folium libri, in quo, eadem manu quâ totus Codex scriptus est, scriptus adhuc extat Index omnium tractatum in Codice contentorum, si sic laudet. Prima pars : *Tractatus de Imitatione Christi domini Thomæ Montii & Agnetis Canonici Regularis.*"

<sup>2</sup> *Indexus Kempnæ*, p. 164, etc.



when it was composed. But it is not said, observe, that Farinator composed it in the time of John xxii., as Semler wrongly believed, who might have deceived himself in reading the Preface, wherein Farinator declares that this book was called *The Light of the Soul* by order of John xxii., and that it had been divided by him (Farinator) into titles, and the titles into paragraphs, and published in 1477. After this it remained for a long while unknown, amid the dust of the libraries.<sup>1</sup> Farinator is then, notwithstanding this demur, a contemporary of Thomas à Kempis, whom he recognised as the author of the 'De Imitatione.'

(4.) The fourth contemporaneous witness, as mentioned by Amort in his *Scutum Kempense*, is PETER SCHOTT, canon of St. Peter's, Strasburg, a poet and distinguished orator. In 1488 he published at the end of the works of Gerson an eulogy of the Chancellor of Paris, which includes this remarkable passage:—"Among these works are treatises which are sometimes attributed to Gerson, although they have a certain author; such is the book *De Contemptu Mundi*, which is proved to be published by a certain Thomas, Canon-Regular. These treatises are not inserted in the works of Gerson." This is a short abstract, but the whole passage should be read as written by Schott.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Liber moralitatum, jussu Joannis Pont. M. *Lumen Animæ* dictus quæ post diutinam occultationem, quum adhuc informis esset . . . Frater Mathus Farinator, in titulos et titulos in paragraphos distinxit . . . et editus est anno 1477." See Testalette, p. 165; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 30; *ibid.*, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 109. The words of Schott are as follows:—"Inter hæc opera, licet nonnulla sint quæ Joanni de Gerson non esse verosimilium sit, ut est Tractatus contra proprietarios &c."



The works of the Chancellor Gerson, says Amort, were, in the first instance, printed at Cologne in 1483. I have seen the copy, he says, in the convent of the "FF. Minorum," and on the title it runs thus:—*Dominus Consolatorius Johannes de Gersenne*; and in the second volume thus:—*Per dominum Joannem de Gersenne, Doctorem Consolatorium*. The second edition is that of Strasburg in 1488. The third is that of Basle in 1489. The fourth, fifth, and sixth are published at Strasburg in 1494, 1502, and 1514. That of the year 1494, continues Amort, we have in our library; and in none of these editions is the book of the 'De Imitatione' to be found.

This evidence has been already, to a great extent, brought forward against the claims of Gerson; and while it militates against him, we are warranted also in using it again as a decisive testimony in behalf of Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione'; and the testimony is the more important, and should carry great weight with it, because it appears that, before writing the words of his Preface, he had made a critical examination of the works of Gerson, and had some good reason for assuring his readers that the 'De Imitatione' was by Thomas à Kempis, and that it was after making this careful inquiry into the matter that he gave his judgment. We may then rest satisfied that if there had not been to his mind

Augustini, Compendium Theologie, Sermo de conceptione, et siqui plures repantur, tamen quia author alius non patebat, ideo loco suo perstiterunt. Alii autem Tractatus, qui sibi nonnunquam tribuuntur, sed tamen authorem certum habent, ut est libellus 'de Contemptu Mundi,' quem constat esse à quodam Thoma Canonico Regulari editum, et plures alii, non sunt operibus inserti." See the Strasburg edition for the year 1488.

something very conclusive, he would not, as the admirer of Gerson, and the editor of his works, have so clearly decided against Gerson being the author, or declared so positively in favour of Thomas à Kempis. We have to remark further that this testimony was first published only seventeen years after the death of Thomas à Kempis, and we therefore claim M. Farinator as a contemporary writer, since he must have been living some years before the death of Thomas, even if he did not know him whilst alive; but of this fact we have no certain information.

Now, notwithstanding the substantial evidence which is here produced, it is only fair to notice an exception which has been taken against it. D. Delfau rejects it, or rather will not allow it, and simply because Schott does not treat *ex professo* the question of the authorship of the 'De Imitatione,' but only incidentally alludes to it.<sup>1</sup> But surely this circumstance gives to it, in our estimation, an additional weight; for it proves that the editor has been naturally led to express his views on the subject, from the force of circumstances, and as it arose in the regular order of his thoughts, unbiassed by the heat of controversy, and that he has simply recorded a well-known *fact*, about which he was personally indifferent, and which for Gerson's sake he might have wished had been otherwise.

(5.) Our *fifth* contemporaneous witness is the editor of the French translation of the four books of the 'De Imitatione,' published in Paris in 1493,—

<sup>1</sup> *Libri de Imit. Joan. Gersoni restit.*, p. 75.

JEHAN LAMBERT. He places at the beginning of his edition these words: "Here beginneth the very salutary book entitled *De Imitatione D. N. J. C. et perfecto Contemptu præsentis hujus miseri Mundi*, which has already been attributed by some to St. Bernard, or to Master John Gerson. Be it so; the thing is otherwise, for the author of it in the Lord was a certain venerable and most devout 'Religious,' a Canon-Regular of St. Augustine, called Brother Thomas à Kempis, Prior in a priory of this Order, named Windesheim, in the diocese of Utrecht. Translated from the Latin into French for the consolation of the simple not understanding Latin, which translation is diligently corrected from the original."<sup>1</sup> At the end are these words also: "Cy finist le Livre de l'Imitation imprimé a Paris, par Jehan Lambert le 26 jour de Novembre 1493."<sup>2</sup> This evidence was given twenty-two years after the death of Thomas à Kempis, by one who had carefully translated the books of the 'De Imitatione' from Latin into French, and it is fair to presume that he was for some time a contemporary of the author. But the special points to notice in this evidence are briefly these: that he affirms, in the city of Paris, where the works of Gerson were well known, and where he was celebrated as a divine, that Thomas à Kempis had composed the book of the 'De Imitatione;' and that since he takes upon himself to correct an error into which some persons had fallen, it is evident that he must have ascertained from one or other

<sup>1</sup> De Gregory, *Hist. du lre. de l'imit.*, i. 237.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 31; Dupin, *Bibl. Eccles.*, t. 12, diss. 4.

source the truth of the statement which he made before publishing it.

(6.) The *sixth* contemporaneous witness is the German translator of the 'De Imitatione,' GASPAR PFORZHEIM, in 1448, that is twenty-three years before the death of Thomas à Kempis, when this writer attributes the books of the 'De Imitatione' to him. Here are his words, "This book of the 'De Imitatione,'" writes he at the head of the volume, "has been composed by a very venerable father, Master Thomas, Canon-Regular; it contains all that of which a spiritual man has need." At the end of the volume are these words: "This volume was finished on the Friday before the feast of Easter, before nine o'clock, in the year 1448, by me, Gaspar de Pforzheim. May God Almighty be praised!"<sup>1</sup>

This manuscript, according to Amort's account, was in 1760 to be found in the monastery of Wingin. And it is to be observed that Gaspar Pforzheim speaks with great veneration of Thomas à Kempis, as a writer who was personally known to him. One can desire nothing more precise than his testimony. I observe also, says Amort in another work, that Besoldus, in his *Spicil. Polit. Jurid.* 3, c. 1. *de jure pacis*, testifies that he had seen in the monastery of Zinsalt the books of the 'De Imitatione' translated into German, and written in the year 1448. See *Heserus Diopt.*<sup>2</sup>

(7.) The *seventh* witness is the CONTEMPORARY BIOGRAPHER of Thomas à Kempis, and it should be observed that this testimony furnishes us with one of

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Scuturn Kempense*, p. 26.

the most conclusive proofs that Thomas is the author of the 'De Imitatione' that can be produced in this controversy. One sees by his recital that he knows every detail of the life of our author, and that he has collected from the mouths of the brethren of Thomas à Kempis all the circumstances that he mentions in his history. Well, this writer, whose candour is to be admired, relates to us, that Thomas à Kempis from his most tender years collected treasures of virtue, made himself a good renown, and fulfilled in his person these words of Holy Scripture—"Happy is the man that has borne the yoke in his youth" (Lam. iii. 27). "These words," continues he, "have been quite verified in the treatise he has written, and especially in his *Soliloquy of the Soul*, in which Jesus Christ converses with his soul as with His spouse. . . . And Thomas himself said to the Saviour—"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth" (1 Sam. iii. 9). Now we have for the rest that which he said also unto the Lord, and what the Lord spake unto him in return, in his treatise entitled, *On the Interior Speaking of Jesus Christ to the Faithful Soul* (which is the title of the third book of the 'De Imitatione'), of which the second chapter begins with the words (named above) 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'"<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, we have a writer perfectly well

<sup>1</sup> Vide *Opera et libri vite fratris Thome de Kempis*, Nuremb. 1494, pp. 84 and 85. Although this is usually made to be the third book of the 'De Imitatione,' there is some reason for believing that it was designed to be a distinct treatise by itself. And by the account here given, it seems to have been written after the *Soliloquium Anime*, and to have been as it were a continuation thereof. It is nearly as large by itself as the other three books of the 'De Imitatione' put together.



informed respecting what Thomas à Kempis was accustomed to say and do; he relates with simplicity, for the edification of the faithful, that which he had seen and heard; he boasts of the *Soliloquy of the Soul* as a work known to have been written by Thomas à Kempis, before speaking of the 'De Imitatione.' And when he quotes this last-mentioned work, he does not speak of the first book, which is properly called the book of the 'De Imitatione,' but of the third book, which is entitled *The Interior Speaking*; he does not quote this work to commend the literary merits of Thomas à Kempis, but to make known his piety and his interior spirit. All the circumstances indicate a witness of good faith and of one well informed.

But further, at the end of the life, the anonymous biographer gives a *Catalogue of the Works of Thomas à Kempis*. "As the brother Thomas," said he, "has written and dictated many treatises during his life, and as few persons know their titles and their names, I shall transcribe here a catalogue of his treatises and of his books, so that those who read them, or hear them spoken of, may know how many of them exist." It is with a perfect knowledge of the matter, and in order to prevent all errors, that he publishes this Catalogue of the works of Thomas à Kempis. Well! let us see what we learn from this official catalogue.

He cites as "No 1, the work On the Three Tabernacles," and counting these as three separate treatises, we come on his list to—



"No. 4. The letter on Mary and on Martha, with other letters."

"No. 5. The little book of sentences and of the words of the humble Jesus; otherwise called the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ, viz., *Qui sequitur me*'"—the first words of the first book of the '*De Imitatione*.'

"No. 6. The second treatise, *Regnum Dei intra vos est*," which is the second book of the '*De Imitatione*,' and the words with which it begins.

"No. 7. The third treatise, 'on the Sacrament, *Venite ad me*,'" which is the fourth book of the '*De Imitatione*,' and the words with which it begins.

"No. 8. The fourth treatise, on 'the Internal Speaking of Jesus Christ to the faithful soul, viz., *Audiam, quid loquatur in me*,'" which is the third book of the '*De Imitatione*,' and the words with which it begins.

"No. 9. The treatise '*De disciplina Claustralium*,' commencing thus, *Apprehendite disciplinam*."

He then pursues the enumeration up to thirty-eight treatises which exist as being the incontestable works of Thomas à Kempis, and which are certainly accredited as his; and he finishes in these terms:—"Here end the titles of the books, treatises, sermons, and letters, to the number of thirty-eight, of the brother Thomas à Kempis."

This catalogue of the works of Thomas à Kempis is not found in the edition of the works given at Augsburg by George Pirckamer, who only edits the biography itself for the sake of edification; he retrenches the Catalogue as a piece foreign to his plan.

But this Catalogue exists complete in *twelve editions* of the works of Thomas à Kempis, previous to the year 1501;<sup>1</sup> and P. Héser published it anew from three manuscripts of the Abbey of Rebdorf in 1651. One of these manuscripts had been copied by the hand of brother Nicolas Numann of Frankfort, a "professed" in the house of Frankentael,<sup>2</sup> only seventeen years after the death of Thomas à Kempis. The work is then very ancient; and Master Delfau has, to say the least, shown bad taste in intimating that the anonymous author of this biography is not contemporaneous. If he had not anything more important to urge against this testimony he had better have been silent altogether, for it must be obvious to every candid mind that the facts here stated prove him to have been a contemporary of Thomas à Kempis.

The testimony is then authentic; it is also decisive. The biographer enumerates the four books of the 'De Imitatione' as four different works, so that his attestation constitutes the authority of each book in particular, and is equivalent for the entire book to a quadruple attestation. He quotes these books without ostentation, and as a simple historian, without suspecting that there would ever be the least contest. He mixes the books of the 'De Imitatione' with the other treatises of Thomas à Kempis without special mention. He remarks only in passing that "the little book of the sentences of the humble Jesus" is called also "the Imitation of Jesus Christ." There is in this remark a freedom of mind which must remove every suspicion of

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 148.

artifice or ignorance. Altogether—that is, taking the account given of Thomas à Kempis in the biography, and its direct intimation of his having written the third book of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ with the Catalogue, in which he plainly enumerates, and that separately, each of the four books of this remarkable work,—altogether, we may regard this testimony as a bulwark by itself in supporting the claims of Thomas à Kempis to be the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’

## CHAPTER XX.

### *The Evidence of Contemporary Witnesses continued.*

IN continuing this important species of evidence, the *eighth* contemporary witness brought forward is JOHN MAUBURNE, Canon-Regular, and Abbot of Lyons. He was not only contemporary with Thomas à Kempis, but made his novitiate in the same monastery, whilst Thomas à Kempis was alive, viz., in that of Mount St. Agnes, near Zwolle; and for six years had the benefit of his society, and frequently conversed with him.<sup>1</sup> He was called "John of Brussels," from the name of his country. After having exercised the principal offices of the Order, in the Congregation of Windesheim, he was called to France to undertake the reform of several Abbeys in that country. Whilst still young he had composed for his own use *The Spiritual Exercises*, which he afterwards communicated to his disciples. In 1491 these exercises were published at Bâle under the title *Rosetum Spiritualium Exercitiorum*, and republished afterwards at Paris in 1510, at Milan in 1603, and at Douay in 1620. In this work Mauburne frequently quotes Thomas à

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Moral. Cert.*, pp. 43, 46; *Scutum Kempense*, p. 37.

Kempis as the author of the 'De Imitatione.' Thus, for example, in the third section of his book of *Exercises*, we read, "Our devout Thomas à Kempis warns us in these terms: 'When you celebrate (*i.e.* the Holy Communion) be not too long, nor too quick, but keep the good medium common to those with whom you live,'"—words which are to be found in the tenth chapter of the fourth book of the 'De Imitatione.' There are other similar quotations in the same work which we need not now cite.<sup>1</sup>

Mauburne also, in his *Scala Communions*, tit. vi. Alp. 22, *de consid. memb.*, says, "Quam doctrinam Thomas noster Kempis insecutus erat, cum communicaturus dicebat. O Deus meus, amor æternus, cupio te suscipere cum vehementissimo desiderio, et dignissima reverentia, quibus unquam exceptus es ab aliquo sanctorum, Et licet indignus sum omnia illa sentimenta devotionis habere," etc.<sup>2</sup> Now in turning to the 'De Imitatione' we shall find these words at nearly the beginning of the seventeenth chapter of the fourth book, with a slight alteration of a few words, and an omission of one or two short exclamations: the words show that the passage has been adapted, but whoever will take the trouble to compare the quotation with the original will have no doubt about their being taken from the fourth book of the 'De Imitatione' at the part alluded to.

Mauburne composed another work called the *Venatorium*, or History of the Church writers of the Order of Canons-Regular of Windesheim. The autograph

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Deduct. Crit.*, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Amort, Scutum Kempenae*, p. 37.

copy is preserved in the Monastery of St. Victor at Paris. In it these words are to be found :—"This brother, Thomas à Kempis, among other treatises which he made, composed the book *Qui sequitur me* (the first book of the 'De Imitatione'), which is falsely attributed to one Master Gerson."

The evidence, then, here given by this witness may be considered very conclusive and weighty. Mauburne, a young student in the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes whilst Thomas à Kempis was alive, a member of the Congregation of Windesheim, a pious, well-informed person, highly esteemed, and considered in France as a writer of some authority, recognises Thomas à Kempis as the author of the 'De Imitatione' in two or three of the books which he wrote. It is just the kind of evidence we might expect to find, which is the more convincing, because it comes in incidentally, as forming part of the several works he composed. And it seems impossible to resist the impression that Thomas à Kempis must be the author of the 'De Imitatione.'

The Gersenists, as might be imagined, have tried to throw doubt upon this evidence, by supposing that Mauburne had copied Trithème. Besides, they presume that Trithème did not attribute the 'De Imitatione' to Thomas à Kempis. How are these points to be met? Well, very easily; the fact is, Mauburne published his *Rosetum* in 1491, three or four years before Trithème brings out his Catalogue of Ecclesiastical writers, and therefore Mauburne could not have copied

<sup>1</sup> Front., *Thom. Vind.*, § 2, n. 3; Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 37, 38.



from Trithème, and it is simply a conjecture on the part of the Gersenists, and utterly groundless. Moreover, Mauburne had no need to gain his information at second-hand, or to learn through another the traditions of Windesheim, of which he was a member.

In a manuscript copy of Mauburne's *Venatorium* bound in the Royal Library of Brussels,<sup>1</sup> a catalogue is added, in which these words occur:—"Frater Thomas Kempis S<sup>m</sup>. Agnetis canonicus regularis scripsit hæc: Dialogus de statu et ortu patrum priorum; Qui sequitur me; Regnum Dei intra vos est; Renovamini spiritu Mentis vestræ; De Sacramento altaris; De disciplina, etc.; compluraque alia devotionis exercitia." It is remarked, however, that Mauburne only enumerates *twenty-five* works, whilst the Anonymous Biographer enumerates *thirty-eight*; but it must be observed that he enumerates them in another order and in another manner; moreover, he does not pretend to give a complete list of them; he however cites three books of the 'De Imitatione,' the 1st, the 2d, and the 4th, as three distinct works, without speaking of the 3d book. From whence it is concluded, with good reason, that Mauburne has constructed this list from the manuscripts, and after the traditions of his Order, if not from Thomas himself, (see the account of his manuscript for 1441,) and not after the anterior catalogues; and consequently his testimony is an independent and studied one; and it is conclusively and distinctly to the effect that Thomas à Kempis is the author of the 'De Imitatione.'<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No. 11,816.

<sup>2</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, n. p. 9.

(9.) The *ninth* contemporaneous witness produced is a COMPANION of MAUBURNE (Socius Mauburni). His name does not appear, but he had been living with him in the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, which Thomas had made famous by the celebrity of his name. He went with Mauburne and others into France, for the purpose of endeavouring to restore the fallen discipline of the house of S. Severinus. This companion of Mauburne wrote a letter to Julian Oret, a 'religious' in the Priory of S. Salvator, Mellodune. The manuscript copy of his letter is preserved at St. Genoveve in Paris, in a Codex of letters of like character.<sup>1</sup> In this letter the companion of Mauburne and the *confrère* of Thomas à Kempis, among other things, wrote these words:—"Without earnest care and diligence thou wilt never acquire virtue: Thomas says, It is harder to resist the passions than to toil in bodily labour."<sup>2</sup> "Turn thyself to God, leave this miserable world, and thou shalt find rest."<sup>3</sup> "If thou wouldst be proficient, keep thyself in the fear of God, and do not be desirous of too much liberty; but restrain thy senses under discipline, and engage not thyself in foolish mirth."<sup>4</sup> All these passages are found in the book of the 'De Imitatione;' when, therefore, he cites them as written by Thomas, there is little reason to doubt that à Kempis is understood. From the manner also in which he quotes the passages from the 'De Imitatione' to enforce the advice he gave, it is pretty clear that he had a very intimate acquaintance

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Scutum Kemp.*, p. 38.<sup>2</sup> *De Imit.*, i. 25.<sup>3</sup> *De Imit.*, ii. 1.<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 21.

with the 'De Imitatione,' if indeed he had not a copy with him, which was not improbable, as it would form a very suitable manual for the work of reformation in which he and his associates were engaged.

This evidence, then, is claimed to be of great value also, inasmuch as this companion of Mauburne must have had some certain knowledge of Thomas à Kempis, from having lived for a time in the same monastery where he was; and must have to some extent been cognisant of what he did and what he wrote; and been in a position to have known very well whether he composed the books of the 'De Imitatione' or not. He had doubtless frequently conversed with him, or listened to him, and had frequent opportunities of learning much about him and his works from the other brethren of the monastery. He was therefore well qualified to give the information that is required; and his evidence is to the effect that Thomas à Kempis is the undoubted author of the 'De Imitatione.' He does not say so directly in such words, but it is perhaps not the less valuable because it is stated in a casual way, as a thing about which there was no doubt, and as a matter taken for granted.

(10.) The *tenth* contemporary witness is ALBERT HARDENBERG, who was a disciple of Wessel, who was a disciple of Thomas à Kempis. The manuscript which includes the writings of this witness was lately discovered by M. Ullmann in the library of Munich. And in it is contained an unpublished passage of Hardenberg, of which the following is a literal translation:—

"The religious of Mount St. Agnes have shown me many writings of the very pious Thomas à Kempis, of which they have preserved, besides many other writings, the golden work of the 'Imitation of Jesus Christ,' from which book Wessel did confess that he had drawn the first taste of true theology (ascetic). This book had determined Wessel, when still a young man, to place himself at Zwolle, that he might learn the rudiments of knowledge, and at the same time enjoy the friendship of the most pious father Thomas, who was a canon in the College of St. Agnes; because Wessel highly revered him, and there was no place where he would more willingly live than here."<sup>1</sup>

In the *Life of Wessel* Hardenberg writes again:—

"The reputation of that excellent man—brother Thomas à Kempis—drew around him a vast number. He wrote at this time the book 'De Imitatione Jesu Christi,' which commences thus, 'Qui sequitur me.' Wessel was accustomed also to say, that he had imbibed his first zeal for piety from this book, and that it had determined him to seek a more intimate knowledge and even friendship with Thomas, and that he went even so far as to embrace the monastic life in the same convent of Mount St. Agnes."<sup>2</sup>

This evidence may at first sight not seem so direct as some of the former ones, as coming through another person; but if the points are fairly considered it is very valuable and conclusive in support of the claim of Thomas à Kempis to be the author of the 'De Imitatione.' Wessel, according to Hardenberg, must have become acquainted with Thomas à Kempis soon after he wrote the 'De Imitatione'<sup>3</sup>—probably about 1420, or say within ten years of this time; and the knowledge which he acquired of Thomas à Kempis, and

<sup>1</sup> Ullmann, *Reformat. in Deutz.*, pp. 295, 732; Hamburg, 1842.

<sup>2</sup> Ullmann, *Vita Wessel*, p. 296; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> "Scribat ea tempestate Thomas librum 'De Imitatione Christi.'" See *Vita Wessel*.

which is recorded by Hardenberg, must date from forty to fifty years before the death of Thomas. It was a likely thing too for Hardenberg to note such a circumstance as that, which had materially influenced the character of his superior, whose life he wrote; for Wessel would, it might be expected, recount with delight his acquaintance with Thomas à Kempis, and how much he had benefited by attending to his instructions. The testimony of Hardenberg is therefore of some moment, for the fame of Thomas à Kempis, and the great esteem that Wessel had for him, led Hardenberg to visit the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, if not to stay there for some time; and during this visit it was that the brethren showed him many of the writings of Thomas à Kempis, and among them the golden work of the 'De Imitatione,' probably the last corrected copy of 1441, which was eventually carried away by the brethren remaining there at the time when the monastery was afterwards broken up. Hardenberg's testimony therefore includes that of others, besides that of Wessel, namely, what he heard from the brethren of Thomas à Kempis who lived at the same monastery, and who must have known all about their venerable brother. Though he himself was not personally acquainted with the revered author, he was living at the time of his death, and must have paid his visit to St. Agnes soon afterwards. This testimony is then very decisive as to Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione,' and contains within it all that is needed to satisfy us on this question.



(11.) The *eleventh* witness is ALBERT KUNE of Duderstadt, who published a treatise called *De Elevatione mentis in Deum* at Memmingen in Suevia, in the year 1489, that is, only eighteen years after the death of Thomas à Kempis; and in the Preface of his book he thus speaks of him, "The author of that most divine treatise '*De Imitatione Christi*' is called Master Thomas, warden and superior of the Canons-Regular." This testimony we claim to put in evidence along with others; it may not be so precise as to the office Thomas held as might be looked for, but it points with sufficient distinctness to his being the author of the '*De Imitatione*.' Evidence will necessarily differ, and this ought not to be overlooked, as it will, with the other evidence advanced, help to strengthen the mass. If such testimony, moreover, could have been found in behalf of Gersen or Gerson, it would have been worth more to either of them severally than pages of the possible probabilities which have been written in their behalf. And why should we take exception to this evidence where Thomas à Kempis, the Sub-Prior, is made "*Præpositus et Prælatus*," when that which makes John Gerson, sometime Chancellor of Paris, an Abbot is received, and is not considered an obstacle to the evidence in his favour? The object of Kune was doubtless to convey the impression that Thomas held a position in the monastery superior to the generality of the monks living there.

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scrutun Kempense*, p. 31. The words are "*Præpositus et Prælati*," which to some minds might carry a higher position than those we have given, though we prefer what we have put down as more in keeping with the post Thomas held. The word "*Prælati*" in the '*De Imitatione*' is usually rendered "superior" in the English translations.



(12.) The *twelfth* witness is GEORGE PIRCKAMER, Prior of the Carthusians at Nuremberg, and a visitor to Germany in some official capacity. In 1494 he published the books of the 'De Imitatione' among the other works of Thomas à Kempis. Amort says that a copy of this edition is in their library of Pöllingen, that all the treatises are in one volume, and that the four books of the 'De Imitatione' stand first, with this title, "Dulcissimi ac divi Thomæ de Kempis, viri pientissimi, religiosissimique, de Imitatione Christi opus quod falsò, apud vulgares Gersoni Cancellario Parisiensi impingetur."<sup>1</sup>

This testimony was given twenty-three years after the death of Thomas à Kempis; and it is to be observed that while Pirckamer attributes the 'De Imitatione' to Thomas à Kempis, he also repudiates as untrue the notion, which some persons in their ignorance held, that Gerson of Paris had written it. This false impression was repudiated also, it will be remembered, by the editors of the earlier editions of Gerson's work. All this shows that within the period of those who were alive when Thomas died, and might have known him, there appears to have been a firm conviction that Thomas à Kempis wrote the 'De Imitatione.'

(13.) The *thirteenth* witness is PETER DANHAUSEN, the librarian of Nuremberg, a man well informed, as the Preface to the edition of 1494 attests. He confesses, in a letter that he wrote, and which is to be found in this same edition, that Thomas à Kempis had

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 31, 37.

put his whole mind into these books, and that he had known both the author and his genius.<sup>1</sup>

(14.) The *fourteenth* witness is JOHN GAILER KAISPERGER, a renowned orator of Strasburg, where he was born in 1445, twenty-six years before the death of Thomas à Kempis. He twice quotes the third book of the 'De Imitatione,' under the name of Thomas, in his *Navicula Fatuorum*, published in 1498.<sup>2</sup> First, on page 89, where he says, *Hæc deduc ad placitum ex Kempis, de naturæ et gratiæ differentia in libro de Imitatione*—in which he refers to the fifty-fourth, fifty-fifth, and fifty-ninth chapters of the third book. Secondly, on page 100, where he says, *Quanto natura amplius premitur et vincitur, tanto major gratia infunditur, et quotidie novis visitationibus interior homo secundum imaginem Dei reformatur. Hæc Thomas de Kempis*—words evidently taken from the fifty-fourth chapter of the third book.

(15.) The *fifteenth* witness is JACOB PHILIP FOREST, of Bergamot in Italy, who was born in the year 1434, thirty-seven years before the death of Thomas à Kempis. He wrote in his *Supplément du Supplément des Chroniques*, which he republished in 1503, that Thomas, an illustrious and pious writer, had published many works for the instruction of the public, and in the first place, the four books of the *Contempt of the World*, which commences thus, *Qui sequitur me*, which clearly designates the books of the 'De Imitatione.'<sup>3</sup>

(16.) The *sixteenth* witness is JODOC BADIUS

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 37; *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 118; *Scutum Kempense*, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 38; *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 118.

ASCENSUS of Brussels, then librarian at Paris. He republished the works of Thomas à Kempis, comprising therein the 'De Imitatione Jesu Christi.' This celebrated man, J. B. Ascensius, himself relates, in the Preface of this edition, that he had undertaken this task at the request of the Benedictines of St. Germain, the Chartreux of Paris, and the Celestines of Soissons, and that he had adorned this edition with a new life of Thomas à Kempis, which he himself had drawn from the most authentic documents. It was his purpose, he continues, in writing this life, to offer a homage to the instructors of his infancy—the brothers of the house of St. Jérôme à Gand, who were taken from the school and society of Florentius, the master and early counsellor of Thomas à Kempis. His edition appeared in 1500. This edition reappeared also in 1520, 1521, and 1522.<sup>1</sup>

There is something remarkable about this testimony, which it may be desirable to point out. The tradition as to Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione' was so well established at the end of the fifteenth century, thirty years after the death of Thomas, that we here find the *Benedictines* of the Monastery of St. Germain de Prés—whose descendants afterwards became the bitterest adversaries of the rights of Thomas, and attributed the 'De Imitatione' to Gersen, as the Benedictine author of it—thus early joining with others in begging this learned man, Ascensius to republish the works of Thomas à Kempis, which includes the 'De Imitatione.' This is very

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 39 ; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 97.

conclusive in favour of Thomas à Kempis ; because it appears that the Benedictines, a hundred years before the controversy began, were in favour of Thomas. And this testimony in his favour is the more strengthened because this edition was published by a learned man in *Paris*—the place where Gerson flourished, and where he would have been able to find out, one would imagine, if any one could, whether there was the slightest foundation for attributing the books of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ to him, and would not have put them among those of Thomas à Kempis, if he had not been fully assured that they had been written by him.

This completes our evidence from contemporary witnesses. Let it not be thought, however, that we have exhausted the list of those authors and writers who, at early dates, have in their writings recognised Thomas à Kempis as the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ Amort, in his *Plena ac succincta informatio de statu totius controversiæ quæ de Authore libelli de Imitatione Christi*, etc., enumerates no less than 170 authors in favour of Thomas, and he takes up several pages (217-228) in giving their names and the dates of their works, but which we need not here produce. It sufficiently proves, however, that Thomas à Kempis was well known as the author, even before the judgment was given in his favour by the Parliament of Paris in 1652. The strength of our defence in support of the rights of Thomas à Kempis rests, however, in this, that we have an array of sixteen contemporary witnesses,—men living at the time of the death of

Thomas à Kempis,—some of them more advanced in life at the time than others; some also had seen and conversed with Thomas à Kempis—had visited the monastery where he lived, and spoken with the brethren; others even had been brothers in the same monastery, and had known Thomas intimately—how he lived, what he did, and what he wrote—and were in a position to give evidence of a reliable kind; and these sixteen contemporary witnesses, one and all, assure us, some in one way and some in another, that Thomas was the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’ And this is the more striking, and will carry with it greater weight, when we consider, on the other side, as we must again remind our readers, that the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis have not been able to produce—or at least to substantiate the evidence of—one single contemporaneous witness in favour of either Gersen or Gerson, the two most formidable opponents of Thomas.

Here is a well-established tradition existing more than twenty years at least before the death of the author, and received also without controversy for more than thirty years after his death, which cannot be reasonably suspected. The testimony which they all, with one voice, declare, is emphatically to be received as valid and incontestable. And to comprehend the value of these historical proofs which have just been produced, we have but to remark, first, that the partisans of Gersen and Gerson have not been able to overthrow the evidence of even one of these sixteen witnesses that have been quoted, though they have



tried in several instances most anxiously to do so, but in vain; and secondly, that the testimony or tradition that Thomas à Kempis was the author of the 'De Imitatione' has been preserved in the midst of a body or society of a religious Order, of which the members know, aid, and observe each other, and can neither, from the purity of their principles and regard to truth, conspire to deceive the public, nor be themselves deceived on the subject of a fact which had taken place before their eyes.

"I will add," says Malou, "that it is a thing unheard of in the history of letters that any one should attribute to a modern author an ancient work. Many times, on the other hand, has a modern work been attributed to an ancient author, to make the work more valuable by affixing to it some grand authority; but the contrary has never been known, and never will be. Or, if so, this would have taken place with the Gersenists; the 'De Imitatione,' which, as they say, existed two centuries before, would be attributed to Thomas à Kempis, who, as they say again, had never written it. Such an act of plagiarism is impossible, especially when the work in question is one so remarkable as the 'De Imitatione Christi.'"

We would in conclusion only observe, that it is now, as it might seem, superfluous to discuss the proofs that can be drawn from the manuscripts and editions, from idioms and the contents of the work, for we hold that from this combined testimony of contemporary witnesses the cause of Thomas à Kempis is positively gained before the secondary or accessory kind of demon-



strative evidence is even entered upon. The question relative to the true author of the 'De Imitatione,' we maintain, is definitely determined from this moment; so that all ulterior discussions can only be for the object of confirming the demonstration already achieved, and for endeavouring to dispel the illusions of the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### *Manuscripts in support of Thomas à Kempis.*

IN bringing forward the evidence arising from MANUSCRIPTS, let us say here, that the only two kinds admissible, or such as will carry appreciable weight in such a controversy, are these: 1st, Those which bear the name of the author, and a certain date; and 2dly, those which clearly point out the author, and an approximate date, from certain incontestable indications. The other manuscripts, and they are considerably the greater number, which bear no name of the author or date, do not furnish such trustworthy evidence as we undoubtedly need in proving the title to the authorship of a book; because, unless there be some peculiar circumstance connected with them—something in the manuscript, or codex, in which the copy of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ is found—some marks or forms of letters belonging to a certain period,—unless there be something of this sort, their age can only be fixed by doubtful conjectures and unwarrantable suppositions, such as have no solid foundation on which to ground our belief or judgment, and would only bring us into a region where we should have no safe

footing, or where at any moment the ground beneath us might give way. It is best to keep aloof from such proofs, as they only unnecessarily encumber our space, and contribute nothing to the cause in hand, if even they do not weaken it, which is oftentimes the case. The most learned palæographers are agreed on this point, that it is impossible to fix the age of manuscripts undated after thirty years, unless there be some special marks to guide them.<sup>1</sup> In order, then, to draw an argument from manuscripts which are anonymous and without date—such as have been produced in this controversy—we must fix the age of the manuscript by some definite circumstance with the greatest precision. And unless we can do this, we do not purpose to enter, as the greater part of the defenders of Gersen have done, into a path of which there is no end, but shall limit ourselves to quote those manuscripts only of which the testimony is clear, decided, and beyond all dispute.

I. The *first* manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' which we shall produce in favour of Thomas à Kempis is that of KIRCHHEIM, which is also one of the two oldest *dated* manuscripts known to exist. The Abbé de Ghesquière wrote a book about it in 1775, with a facsimile of the remarkable words which it bears on its first page. The manuscript itself, however, is to be found in the Bourgogne Library at Brussels, under the number 15,137. The volume is in octavo, and contains only the first three books of the 'De Imitatione,' in the order in which they are to be found

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Deduct. Crit.*, p. 14; Trombelli, *L'arte di conoscere i codici*.

at the present time; and has no other work along with it.

The date of it is 1425, that is about five to ten years after the 'De Imitatione,' or at least the greater portion of it, was probably composed; and it is directly attributed to Thomas à Kempis, as the following words at the commencement of the manuscript sufficiently testify:—

"Notandum quod iste tractatus editus est a probo et egregio viro, magistro Thoma, de Monte S<sup>te</sup> Agnetis et Canonico Regulari in Trajecto, Thomas de Kempis dictus, descriptus ex manu autoris in Trajecto, anno 1425, in sociatu provincialatus."

Which may be rendered thus:—

"Let it be observed that this Treatise has been composed by a pious and learned man, Master Thomas of Mount St. Agnes, and Canon-Regular of Utrecht, called Thomas à Kempis. It has been copied from the manuscript of the author in (the diocese of) Utrecht, in the year 1425, and in the Society's house of the Provincialate."

Upon this very important notification the Abbé de Ghesquière says, "I flatter myself that there is no impartial person who will contest with me the antiquity and authenticity of this epigraph, especially if he is careful to compare the genius, the peculiarity, the character, of the text and the form of the figures, with those of all other manuscripts of the same age and the same country." He further notices that this epigraph, containing the words *Thomas de Kempis dictus . . . anno 1425*, was made whilst the pious Canon-Regular was living; and that even for more than forty-five years before his death the custom of giving the name of Thomas à Kempis to the work of the 'De Imita-

tionne Christi' had been already established—a very clear proof that he had been recognised as the author of it at a very early time.

Moreover, this epigraph teaches us, continues the Abbé, that certainly before the year 1426 an autograph copy of the 'De Imitatione' by Thomas à Kempis had been deposited in that which was then called the *Sociatus Provincialatús*, that is, as I believe the explanation to be, in that Canonical House of the Congregation of Windesheim, in the diocese of Utrecht, in which they held each year the Provincial Chapter, and where the Companion or Secretary of the Superior of the Province also resided, when he was not obliged to follow him in his visits to the Canonical Houses of the same Congregation of which the pious Canon of Mount St. Agnes was a member.

But further, this epigraph gives us to understand, that it was in this same place that this copy of the 'De Imitatione' had been written in 1425—*Descriptus ex manu Autoris in Trajecto, anno 1425, in Sociatu Provincialatús*,—a circumstance which proves the authenticity of this manuscript, and which seems to show the great estimation in which at that time the autograph of Thomas à Kempis was held, since it was needful to resort to the place where it was deposited to get a uniform copy from this precious original.<sup>1</sup>

These observations will acquire more strength if our readers will only call to mind the evidence given by Buschius and Brother Herman—the first and second of the Contemporaneous Witnesses that were

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertation sur l'Auteur du livre intitulé De l'Imit. J. C.*, pp. 26-29.

cited—the latter of whom mentions the yearly meeting of the Chapter of the Canons-Regular at Windesheim, which was the superior monastery of the Society ; and that on one of these occasions he had met Thomas à Kempis, who lived only about a league distant from the place at Mount St. Agnes. Buschius narrates that Thomas paid a visit to the Monastery of Windesheim in 1424, when he had a vision or presage of the Prior's death, and mentions him on this occasion as the author of the treatise *Qui sequitur me* ; and that he along with others had come to consult the Prior about some certain business. Might it not be possible that this was the very occasion when Thomas and his companions came to make a formal deposit of the autograph copy of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' written by Thomas à Kempis, in the house of the Provinciate at Windesheim, and that this was the special business for which they had come to see the Prior ? One thing appears clear, that the depositing of the autograph manuscript referred to in the epigraph of the Kirchheim manuscript must have taken place about this time, if not before.

But more than a hundred years before the Abbé de Ghesquière gave his account of the Kirchheim manuscript its importance had been recognised by another writer. Hesperus in his *Hecatomb* speaks concerning this manuscript after the following manner :—

"There is a town in Württemberg which they call Kirchheim; in the neighbourhood of this place David Ehinger spent his life, who in his own handwriting (*chirographo suo*) bore testimony respecting three books of the 'De Imitatione,'



I., II., and III., and did solemnly asseverate three things concerning it worthy of public faith; *first*, that the name of the author which it bears upon it is Thomas à Kempis, Canon-Regular in the diocese of Utrecht. *Another thing*, that this copy (of the 'De Imitatione') was transcribed from the autograph of Thomas himself. *And lastly*, that it had the date from the birth of Christ the Saviour, one thousand four hundred and twenty-five."<sup>1</sup>

This is corroborative evidence of great moment, showing that this manuscript, with these several points in support of the claim of Thomas à Kempis upon it, was in existence, and known, valued, and commented upon, some time before the controversy respecting the authorship of the 'De Imitatione' arose.

A curious story is told however about this manuscript. It appears that at the outset of the controversy the Gersenists had asserted that there was not a more ancient manuscript which recognised Thomas à Kempis as the author of the 'De Imitatione' than that of the year 1477. This statement was met by the exhibition of manuscripts before this date, and among them of this very manuscript of 1425, which was more than fifty years before the date they had assigned. The effect of the production of it was very striking, and the more so that it was corroborated by the testimony of David Ebinger; for, when the learned saw this authentic manuscript, and the epigraph which it bears, it is said that many of the defenders of Jean Gersen ranged themselves henceforward on the side of Thomas

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 24. Prosper Farandus also cites the epigraph on the Kirchheim manuscript. Vide Ghesquiere, *Dissertation sur l'Auteur*, etc., p. 21.

à Kempis; there being more solid proofs, as they conceived, in favour of the latter than of the true or pretended Abbot of Vercelli. But whether Rosweyde, to whom this manuscript had been sent from Kirchheim about the year 1628, had at first sent it back to its possessor or not; whether a hand jealous of the glory of Thomas à Kempis had furtively carried it off from Rosweyde or no; it is certain that from the year 1641 this manuscript could no longer be found at Antwerp or anywhere else; and hence it happened that the advocates for Thomas à Kempis were now, in their contest with the Gersenists, compelled to be content with the testimony of David Ehinger, signed with his own hand—about the said Kirchheim manuscript—without their being able to produce, at the tribunal of the public examination into the authorship of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ this interesting manuscript, or an authentic copy of it.

The Abbé de Ghesquière, however, writing in the year 1775, says:—

“I believe that I am going to produce evidence that will indemnify them well for their loss, and that it will equally prove the three important articles which the learned librarian of Augsburg attests to have read in the manuscript of Kirchheim of the year 1425.

“It is not very long since, whilst travelling in Holland and several other provinces of the Low Country, with the view of ascertaining what there was to be found that was most rare in literature, that I had the happiness of discovering, in a neglected corner of a certain library, a small volume in quarto, bound in old parchment, torn from some missal manuscript. Having seen upon the back of the cover these words written in great letters, *De Imitatione Christi, et contemptu omnium vanitatum*

stantly. I opened the volume with eagerness, and I soon saw that this manuscript, containing the first three books of the *De Imitatione*, contained characters of the fifteenth century. At the first glance it appeared to me to be even as ancient as that of the 'College of Clermont at Paris, of which the learned *Conseiller-Pensionnaire*' of Rotterdam, the late M. Gerard Leerman, had made the acquaintance, and which I had seen more than once. I was confirmed in this opinion in reading at the bottom of the first page a note written in a very ancient hand, which testified that this manuscript was of the year 1425, and this it was that increased my envy (or desire) that I might examine it at my ease and compare it with that written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, of the year 1441, and kept at the house of the Bollandists at Antwerp. Happily I obtained the desired permission, with the most entire liberty to make traces of it, and to engrave such parts as I judged right."

He then alludes to the characters of the manuscript itself, and to the epigraph or inscription on the bottom of its first page, of which he gives a facsimile.

Whether the production of this important manuscript would have in any wise diminished the heat of the controversy it is not for us to say; it would in all probability have gained over some of the candid opponents to the side of Thomas, as it had formerly done; and it was unfortunate, to say the least, that it was not forthcoming on several occasions when it would have done good service to the cause of Thomas.

So important is the evidence arising from the manuscript itself, and the inscription, that this may be the proper place to make a few remarks upon the Codex. Having had the volume several times in our hands we were able to examine it somewhat fully. The manuscript is, as the reader may judge from the photographic specimen here inserted—which we were

kindly permitted to take by the authorities of the Bourgogne Library,<sup>1</sup>—very far from being so clearly and legibly written as the manuscript copy of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis 1441, or as the other specimen of Thomas à Kempis’ handwriting taken from a Codex containing some other works of his; nor is it so distinct and plain as the inscription or epigraph which attests the age and name of the author on the first page of the manuscript. The ink in these instances severally retains its blackness in a remarkable degree, whilst the ink of this oldest dated manuscript is somewhat faded, and must have been of an inferior quality. There seems also to have been a certain degree of carelessness and haste in writing it; the figures on the right-hand side of the Contents in the specimen seem to have been twice corrected, and wrongly placed at last; whilst those on the left-hand side, though not corrected, are all wrongly placed except one; for it will be observed that it makes the first book of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ to contain only twenty-four chapters, whilst there are twenty-five. The mistake may however be accounted for by noticing how the headings of two chapters have been combined together under the number twelve; the figure 14 therefore should have been where that of 13 is, which would then have

<sup>1</sup> The specimen is taken from that part of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ at which the second book begins. This is the part where the specimen of the 1441 manuscript written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis is taken from also, and which is to be seen in the frontispiece. A difference between the two is to be observed; for, whereas the contents of the second book precede the commencement of the second book in the 1441 manuscript, the contents of the first book precede it in the 1425 manuscript.

de utilitate aduocare et  
 de temptacionibus resistere  
 de tamenando uideri uideri  
 de opibus ex caritate factis 141  
 de superioribus de fatu aliam 142  
 de monasterii uita 143  
 de episcopis et patre 144  
 de episcopis domi religionis 145  
 de amore solitudinis et illorum 146  
 de reparatione cordis 147  
 de consideratione quidne impede 148  
 de meditatione mortis 149  
 de iudicio et pennis piores 150  
 de seruiciu emendatione 151

Insuper ad monachos. id mitra  
miseratione 152  
**R**egnum dei mitra est dicit dominus. Con  
 uerte te ex toto corde ad dominum et  
 elinque que in seipso mundum et inueniet glori  
 am requiem. Dicit ex tunc contempne et mit  
 ratione te dare et uidebis regnum dei mitra te uen  
 i. Est enim regnum dei pax et gaudium in prope  
 udd non de improbitate ad te misit ope  
 rans compositionem sua si dignum illi ab initio pa  
 uat manentem. Omnis gloria et deus ab initio  
 et illi complacent sibi frequenter illi uisitatione bono





brought the figures right, making the last chapter to be numbered 25. Moreover, the contents or summaries of the chapters of the second and third books of the 'De Imitatione' are wanting. The inscription is, moreover, by a different hand, and apparently the handwriting of a more educated man. These things lead us to suppose that this manuscript of the year 1425 must have been written by one of the junior brethren of the Society, or by one of the common copyists, and that it had been afterwards attested by one of the senior members of the Confraternity.

Another point to notice is, that the inscription must have been affixed at or near the time stated; and for this reason, because the form of the two figures 4 and 5 in the date 1425, is that which belongs to the period, and did not long continue in use after this time. A reference to the specimen of this manuscript will easily explain what is meant, when we observe how the figure 4 in numbers 14 and 24 is made; it has the appearance of the figure which is used for 8 with the lower strokes turned outward; and then we observe that the figure 5 in number 15 in two instances is more like the figure 4 which is used by us at this day in writing, and which many persons not accustomed to examine ancient manuscripts have mistaken for a 4, not knowing the form of the figure 5 which was then used, and shortly after this time ceased to be used. It is by such marks as these that palæographers are able to determine the dates, or periods at least, in many cases with great accuracy. Moreover there is nothing to lead us to imagine other-

wise than that the date was put down at the time or year as stated.

This 1425 manuscript proves also what we have before intimated, that the 1441 manuscript was not the *protograph* copy of the 'De Imitatione,' but copied by Thomas from an older one, and that the original copy must have been in existence before this 1425, which was written from a copy by Thomas à Kempis, then used by the copyist. And from the several manuscripts that appear in perfect agreement with that of the 1441 written by Thomas, it is evident that he had before 1425 fixed the text as it was permanently to be. Hence it is reasonable to assume, as it has been done, that Thomas à Kempis composed and completely perfected his work, the 'De Imitatione Christi,' between 1415 and 1424, when he was between thirty-five and forty-four years old—in the vigour of his intellectual faculties and the full fervour of his devotion, matured by experience.

That the evidence of this manuscript is especially valuable, and gives by itself alone sufficient proof to substantiate the claim of Thomas à Kempis to be the author, let it be observed, that even in *manuscripts* Thomas à Kempis precedes all his competitors, for there is not known to be in existence any other manuscript *dated*, with the name of the author, that will bear comparison with this. There are, as M. de Grégory and others have shown, several manuscripts of Gersen, and several more of Gerson; but neither one nor the other can establish so old an one as this with any degree of certainty.

The most ancient manuscript dated, with the name of Gersen, is that of 1464. This is the manuscript of *Parma*.

The most ancient manuscript dated, with the name of Gerson, is that of 1460. This is the manuscript called *Sangermanensis* or *Bretonianus*.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the most ancient dated manuscript, bearing the name of Thomas à Kempis, is *thirty-five years anterior* to the most ancient one which bears the name of Gerson, and *thirty-nine years or more anterior* to the most ancient which bears the name of Gersen.

But observe this point, which gives a still greater weight to the manuscript bearing the name of Thomas à Kempis : while it was written *forty-six years before his death*, the oldest manuscript which bears the name of Gerson upon it was written *thirty-one years after his death*; and the most ancient manuscript with the name of Gersen *was written about two and a half centuries after his death*. Thus Thomas à Kempis, who died forty-two years after Gerson, and more than two hundred and fifty years after Gersen, as one has been assured, is positively recognised as the

<sup>1</sup> M. Veigl, and M. de Grégory, *Hist. du liv. de l'Imit.*, state, from Amort, that there is a manuscript with the name of Gerson, and with the date of 1441, which is found in the Monastery of Pollingen. They cite the *Plena ac accurata Informatio*, p. 146. Well, but on this page Amort alludes to a manuscript of 1477 with the name of Gerson. As, moreover, Amort was a "religious" of Pollingen, and as he has made no mention of the Gersonists' manuscript of 1441, this manuscript as spoken of by Veigl and Gregory must be placed among the fabulous monuments which the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis have inadvertently alleged, and which has no foundation but in their own imagination or misconception. Such a discovery of falsehood in the evidence brought forward to damage the cause of Thomas only serves to increase our faith in his claim, and shows to what worthless conjectures his opponents are driven. *Vide* Malou, *Recherches*, note, p. 102.

author of the books of the 'De Imitatione,' before either of these two writers were. Although living after them, he is recognised as the author in manuscripts more ancient than those of his adversaries. Here then Thomas à Kempis has the advantage in manuscripts also over his competitors.<sup>1</sup>

II. The next manuscript which is produced in support of the claim of Thomas à Kempis, and bearing his name, is also dated 1425. It contains the four books of the 'De Imitatione,' and belonged formerly to the Canons-Regular of the Monastery of GAESDONCK, near Goch, north of Cologne. This manuscript, which was at first the property of the Convent of Bethlehem, of the same Order, near Dotinghem, not far from Zwolle, was given by the Prior of the "Croisiers d'Emmerich," called Tauschlipper, to Frederick Ketteler, who offered it to the Monastery of Gaesdonck, when he was received as Canon-Regular.

At the end of the second book of the 'De Imitatione' this subscription may be read, "Anno Domini 1425 in die S<sup>m</sup> Elisabeth;" at the end of the fourth there is this, "Anno Domini 1427 in die SS. Crispini et Crispiniani."

It is to be regretted that those who have made the manuscript known have not given us the literal inscription, which contains, as they tell us, the name of the author.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, p. 103. The *Volkshalle* of Cologne, No. 77, 85, 87 of the year 1851, and in 1852 a description is given of the Gaesdonck manuscript. The remarks have in part been reproduced by the *Työl of Amsterdamm* in April 1852, and in the *Journal Historique* of M. Kersten, t. xix. p. 52.

The next manuscript which we have to consider is one full of the deepest interest, being the copy of the 'De Imitatione Christi' written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis himself; but this we must reserve to another chapter.

## CHAPTER XXII.

*The Manuscript Copy written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis.*

THE third manuscript we have to produce in favour of Thomas à Kempis—and which has played so great a part in the past controversies—is the celebrated copy written by his own hand, and having his own signature attached to the Codex, and dated 1441, as the inscription at the end sufficiently attests, which is as follows, many of the words being abbreviated:—*Finitus et completus anno Domini MCCCCXII per manus fratris Thomas Kempensis in Monte S<sup>r</sup> Agnetis prope Zwollas.*

We claim the manuscript, then, as having been written by the author of the 'De Imitatione Christi.' We are willing to admit that Thomas à Kempis was a copyist, that he had copied several works that were not his own, that he had even copied this very manuscript from another manuscript of earlier date, but all the same, we contend, notwithstanding, that Thomas à Kempis did, in the first instance, compose the words of the 'De Imitatione,' and that this



manuscript copy of 1441 is in the handwriting of the veritable author. We have already given sufficient evidence amply to justify the assertion, but there are more particular proofs which we purpose to bring forward in support of the claims of Thomas from this manuscript, after we have given an account of it.

The Codex in which this copy is found is still at this day to be seen at the Bourgogne Library, Brussels, under the numbers 5855 and 5861. It is a little book in duodecimo, covered with black leather and much worn, and in the middle there has been a clasp of yellow copper. The clasp is now, however, gone, but the eye and staple belonging to it are still to be seen on the book, in good preservation. It is very neatly written all throughout, great pains evidently having been taken with it. It is chiefly written upon parchment, but with a few leaves on paper by the same hand; the letters both in the body and the titles of the book being in Gothic characters. On the second leaf of the book there is evidently a little history of it after it left the hands of Thomas, in these words:—  
"Liber Monasterii Canonicorum Regularium in monte sanctæ Agnetis Virginis et Martyris, prope Swollam." And following this there is written, "Quem F. Joannes Latomus Professus Ordinis Cann. Regg. in throno B. M. prope Herentals ejusdem Ordinis Generalis Minister, facta visitatione Monasterii Beatæ Agnetis prope Swollam ejusdem Monasterii ruinis ereptum, ne penitus interiret Antuerpiam allatum, Joanni Bellerio amico veteri et fideli DD. an. salutis 1577. Porro Joannes Bellerus PP. Societatis Jesu in gratiam suorum

filiorum, quos eadem Societas Religiosos fovet lubens donavit Calen. Junii 1590."<sup>1</sup> We may continue the history a little further, by saying that after much formal proceeding to obtain the Codex from the monastery of the Professed Jesuits, it was brought from Antwerp to Paris on the 29th May 1652, there to be examined by the learned men before the Court of Request in the Parliament of Paris. It was investigated on several other occasions by various learned persons; afterwards it was returned to the Jesuit fathers at Antwerp; but eventually found a resting-place in the Bourgogne Library at Brussels. We fortunately procured a negative photograph of the book; and in the frontispiece a specimen of it will be found, where the reader will see the exact size of the pages, the character of the writing, and even in some degree the various abbreviations of the words, and marks which Thomas à Kempis has adopted. The initial letter is illuminated in blue.

But one important matter which the reader should especially notice is this, that the four books of the 'De Imitatione' do not stand alone by themselves in the volume. They certainly come first; but there are a number of other acknowledged treatises of Thomas à Kempis, and there are none of any other person.

Here is a table of the treatises contained in this Codex; they all appear to be clearly written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, just the same as the four books of the 'De Imitatione:' and are put down in the order in which they are found.

<sup>1</sup> Boussy, *La Contestation touchant l'Auteur De l'Imit.* etc., p. 237.

- " In hoc volumine hi libri continentur ;  
Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris. (This denotes  
the 1st book of the ' De Imitatione.')
- Regnum Dei intra vos est, Dicit Dominus. (This indi-  
cates the 2d book of the ' De Imitatione.')
- De Sacramento. Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis. (This  
denotes the 4th book.)
- Audiam quod loquatur in me Dominus Deus. (This points  
out the 3d book of the ' De Imitatione.')
- De disciplina claustralium. Apprehendite disciplinam.  
Epistola devota ad quemdam regularem.  
Renovamini autem spiritu mentis vestrae.  
Cognovi, Domine, quia æquitas judicia tua.  
Recommendatio humilitatis. Discite a me.  
De mortificata vita. Gloriosus apostolus Paulus.  
De bona pacifica vita. Si vis Deo dignus.  
De devotione mentis. Vacate et videte cum cæteris.  
Brevis admonicio. Ab exterioribus."

And it is to be further observed, that while the other treatises form but a continuation of the four books of the ' De Imitatione ' which precede them, the attestation or subscription of Thomas à Kempis, as given above, is not placed immediately after the four books of the ' De Imitatione,' but at the end of the Codex, after all the treatises ; so that the attestation does not apply to the four books of the ' De Imitatione ' alone, but to all the treatises which are found in the Codex.

Now it is thought quite impossible by those who have well considered the matter, that a writer so humble and pious as Thomas à Kempis would have put, or wished to transcribe at the head of some works of his—works unquestionably written by him, and concerning which there is no dispute,—four very com-

mendable treatises which did not belong to him. This would appear as if he desired to plume himself with the fine feathers of another, to commend himself, or to acquire a celebrity by false means, using a species of deception, designedly leading others to go away with the idea that he wrote such treatises when he did not,—a character so inconsistent to that he evidently possessed, as we may judge, not only from what is said of him, but from what may be drawn from his devotional writings, in which he strongly enforces sincerity, truthfulness, and humbleness of mind,—that it is difficult to conceive such a person palming off as his writings those which he did not compose. It is not, as we say, in keeping with what we know of him; so that the only reasonable conclusion we can come to is, that the four books of the '*De Imitatione*' were indeed written by Thomas à Kempis; and that in his own estimation,—as they have since been received by the whole of Christendom,—they were regarded as his chief works, and therefore placed at the head of his other treatises.

We contend, then, that in copying the four books of the '*De Imitatione*' at the head of some of his other works, Thomas à Kempis has declared himself to be the author of them. This is to be regarded as the testimony of Thomas à Kempis himself; and no one can reasonably refuse it. Surely a man must know whether he has written certain works or not; no one is better able to know this than himself; and since Thomas has intimated that he is the author of the four books of the '*De Imitatione*,' we have no ground

for doubting him, but everything, on the contrary, even overwhelming proofs, to support his claim.

While the defenders of our pious author have endeavoured to establish his rights by these words of the epigraph at the end of the books of the '*De Imitatione*,' *per manus fratris Thomæ*,—asserting that this expression indicates the author of the volume,—we cannot overlook the fact, which has been noticed already, that the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis have on the other hand held that these words overthrow the rights of the writer, because they indicate the *copyist*. And they conclude that our author had merely copied the '*De Imitatione*;' meaning by this, that he had not composed it.

Now, we do not admit the justice of this reasoning ; for it does not follow that, because he had copied some works, he could not be an author ; it is allowed on all hands that Thomas à Kempis was an author, and be it observed that the other treatises in the same volume are admitted to have been composed by him ; and the question is, whether he originally wrote the '*De Imitatione*' or not ? At first sight, the words of the epigraph, we admit, do not appear to prove the rights of Thomas à Kempis, since similar words are to be found in the volumes which this author did not compose, but only copied ; for it must be remembered that early in life he was much employed in copying manuscripts, and by it he and his brethren in the monastery chiefly supported themselves. Hence he copied the Missal in 1414, the year after he entered Holy Orders, and again in 1417. And he copied the Latin Bible in



1439, and put this subscription at the end :—"Finitus et completus anno Domini 1439 per manus F. Thomæ Kempis in Monte Agnetis,"<sup>1</sup> which is very similar to the one found at the end of the Codex, which contains the four books of the 'De Imitatione,' and, as his adversaries argue, we may be quite certain he did not compose either of these works (the Bible and the Missal), but must have copied them, therefore he must have also copied the 'De Imitatione.' But the friends of Thomas contend that this deduction is unsound ; and that the fact of his having been a copyist, and having copied works that could not have been composed by him, do not overthrow the rights of Thomas à Kempis to be the author of the 'De Imitatione,' because the functions of the copyist do not exclude the rights of the author, especially when the question is respecting such an author as Thomas à Kempis.

But our essential argument is, that the epigraph or attestation is not attached to the 'De Imitatione' of 1441 *alone*, as copied by Thomas à Kempis, but, as we maintain, and have already shown, in its being found in connection with the nine other undoubted works of Thomas à Kempis, which no one has ever dared to contest with him,—works, too, of a similar character and of a similar style of composition to the four books of the 'De Imitatione,' so that we cannot

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 12. This copy of the Latin Bible is here said by Amort to be preserved at Cologne. The writer, however, spent some time in searching the libraries of Cologne, and making inquiry about it, but it was nowhere to be found, neither did any one know anything of it. From what was said it is evident that many valuable mss. belonging to this city have been transferred to other places.



for one moment imagine that Thomas would himself, with his own hands, have placed the books of the 'De Imitatione' at the head of his other works, putting the epigraph to the whole of the treatises, unless he had been the author of them. Since, however, he has done so, the argument is decisively in favour of his being the writer; nor could there be any design to mislead people, as it would have been abhorrent to the mind of Thomas even to contemplate, much less to carry out, and therefore cannot be entertained. We hold, then, to the statement we have advanced, that this epigraph is a declaration of Thomas à Kempis, and worthy of our belief, that he is the author, and not a mere copyist, of the 'De Imitatione.' For if the epigraph signifies anything in the position where it is employed, it clearly intimates that, as Thomas was the author of nine treatises which follow, so he must be equally the author of the four books of the 'De Imitatione' which precede them.

But there is another strong argument to be drawn from this manuscript as indicating that the author was none other than the writer, or say even copier, of it,—Thomas à Kempis. There appears throughout the codex manuscript numerous erasures, and places where, with evident care, Thomas has corrected faulty points; the parchment shows the scratch of the pen-knife in many places, over which words have been again written. It is true that, notwithstanding these, the first impression, upon taking up the little volume of 1441, and carefully looking over its pages, is, that it has been copied from another manuscript. This quite falls

in with the view taken by the supporters of Thomas à Kempis, as it has been shown that they do not contend that this is the original manuscript, and therefore we must not look for such corrections and alterations as an author would make on revising his first copy. This had evidently been done some time before; the text, in the main, had been fixed upon and settled, and the copy of such had gone forth some fifteen or sixteen years ago. But taking all this into account,—which it is necessary to do in getting at the exact truth,—there are certain marks and indications to be found, by a more attentive examination of the manuscript, which show that the author's hand had been employed upon it. Just what we might expect to find under the circumstances—a careful endeavour in the first instance to keep to the settled text, that differences of reading might be avoided as much as possible, but withal a retouching of it up in places afterwards,—signs of suggested improvements, or of additions,—marks which none but an author would think of putting in. There is even a whole sentence in the eleventh chapter of the second book, “On the Paucity of the Lovers of the Cross of Jesus,” which is not to be found in copies previously written.<sup>1</sup> I will dispense, says the Abbé de Ghesquière, with bringing as proofs of what has been stated a long list of phrases retouched and improved in Thomas's autograph copy of 1441, because it is easy for any one to convince himself of this by comparing

<sup>1</sup> After having said in this chapter, as before in the 1425 manuscript, that “those who love Jesus only for Himself, and not for their own consolation, still bless Him in all the tribulation and bitter griefs of soul, as in their highest state of comfort,” the pious Canon here adds two additional lines.

this manuscript, or the edition which Rosweyde has given, with other manuscripts anterior to 1441. Moreover, Thomas has drawn a red line over the erasures and corrections in many places, as in Book I. chap. 7, Book II. chaps. 10 and 12, Book III. chap. 55, Book IV. chap. 2. Words may be seen as having been substituted, and then not retained. Is not this, then, one of those liberties which a simple copyist would not dare to arrogate to himself? He has little time or disposition for it, whilst, on the contrary, it is just what those would do who, retouching their own works, do not scruple here and there to add an idea which presents itself to the mind, and afterwards effacing it when they have thought better about it.<sup>1</sup>

But here is another indication of Thomas's right of authorship in this copy of 1441. It will be observed that this saintly man has not left any blank space at the end of the summary of the heads of chapters which precede the first and second books of the '*De Imitatione*.'<sup>2</sup> It would be impossible to get another line in; and he has left very little blank space at the end of the two above-named books. Moreover, he has placed at the end of both one and the other the formula *Expliciunt*. It is concluded, then, that in writing these first two books, Thomas had no further design of adding to them in any degree, and only thought it right to propose the correction of a few phrases, and the adjusting of a word here and there. But it is to

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertation sur l'Auteur*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See an instance of this in the photograph specimen placed at the beginning of this book.

be noticed that in the summary of the heads of chapters to the book entitled *De Sacramento*, and in that summary which precedes the treatise *De Interna Christi locutione*, he has left in each case a blank capable of containing the summaries of three chapters at least, and at the end of these last two books of the 'De Imitatione' he has not placed the formula *Explicit* or *Explicit*; and further, he has left unfilled up several pages, just in proportion to the blanks he has left in the summaries of the chapters; from which it is concluded that, when writing the manuscript in 1441, he had formed the project of adding to them afterwards some other chapters, although for reasons unknown to us he never accomplished it.

Another point, however, which we must not omit to mention, and one in which the 1441 manuscript differs from the preceding manuscript of 1425, is the disposition of the books of the 'De Imitatione.' In the 1425 manuscript we have the first three books as we now usually have them placed,—first, the *Qui sequitur me*; second, the *Regnum Dei*; and thirdly, the *Audiam quod*. The fourth, *De Sacramento*, is not in the manuscript. There is another manuscript, also dated 1427, in the Bourgogne Library, which is not brought forth on one side or the other, because it is without any author's name.<sup>1</sup> In this we have the whole of the four books as they are now found. There is also another.

<sup>1</sup> This very ancient-dated manuscript was unknown to Mgr. Malou, having been purchased for the Bourgogne Library since he published the third edition of his *Recherches*. It was bought for the low sum of sixty-francs. It is clearly written, and in a handwriting very similar to that of Thomas à Kempis.

dated 1429, which is without the author's name also, and therefore does not count in the controversy, but it bears the same testimony to the order of the books. We observe also in the Magdalen manuscript at Oxford entitled *De musica Ecclesiastica*, dated 1438, that we have the first three books as now. All these manuscripts are of dates prior to the 1441 manuscript. We do not take into account the undated manuscripts, though many of them doubtless bear testimony to this point also; but in those we can depend upon for the dates, it is to be noticed that a certain order of the books seems to have been followed; and it is probable that it was that which had been fixed upon by the Superior of the Order at Windesheim with Thomas à Kempis, when that copy, alluded to in the 1425 manuscript, was deposited in the mother-house of the Provincialate. Now, in the 1441 autograph copy of Thomas à Kempis, it is to be observed that he alters this order of the books, and places what is now reckoned as the fourth—the *De Sacramento*—as the third book; and the third book as we have it—the *Audiam quod*—in the fourth place. And this difference in the order of the books not only appears in the position they hold in the manuscript, but in the catalogue which Thomas gives us of all the various books to be found in the Codex, which contains, as we have said, others than those of the 'De Imitatione.' Moreover, whilst at this point, it may be well to remember that this new disposition of the books, as found in the 1441 copy by Thomas à Kempis, is the same as that which we find in the catalogue of the contemporaneous bio-



number of Thomas when he enumerates the various  
 works of the author. And it may be noticed also that  
 Jean Bédouin, another contemporary witness, who  
 lived at Bruges for a while, gives in his cata-  
 logue three books of the 'De Imitatione,' according  
 to the new disposition inserted in the 1441 manu-  
 script of Thomas à Kempis, uniting altogether the  
 first book as we have it—the *Audiam quod*. It is  
 clear that these individuals who were acquainted with  
 Thomas being conversant with his writings, recog-  
 nized the new order of the books he had adopted.  
 We have no definite reason afforded as to the cause  
 or object of this change. It might be that he con-  
 sidered the book *In Sacramento* would come better as  
 a supplement to the first two books, being more of  
 a size with them than the third, the *Audiam quod*,  
 which, in the first instance, he had evidently written  
 as a treatise to stand independently by itself. But  
 whatever the cause or object in making this new dis-  
 position, the point or force of our argument to be  
 noticed is, that a mere copyist or transcriber would not  
 ordinarily dream of taking such a liberty, or presume  
 to make such a new disposition, and alter the settled  
 order, much less such a humble and upright man as  
 Thomas à Kempis is generally accounted to have been,  
 had he been only a copyist; but inasmuch as he did  
 do this, it is to us an indicative token that he was the  
 author of the several books of the 'De Imitatione,' and  
 felt in some wise justified in so doing.

If all these considerations do not prove that  
 Thomas à Kempis, in writing the manuscript of 1441,



comported himself as the true author of the books which he transcribed from one of his more ancient autographs, we cannot imagine any clearer proof can be brought forward, unless, as his opponents maintain, that he ought, without any question, to have proclaimed himself the author of it, so that there might not be any doubt about it. But Thomas was not the man to put forth a pompous avowal, *Ille ego, qui quondam*, etc., a declaration so ostentatious that it would in no wise fall in with the modesty and piety of Thomas.<sup>1</sup>

We have, however, still more substantial evidence, that the books of the 'De Imitatione' have been composed by Thomas à Kempis, arising from a further examination of the structure of this 1441 manuscript, and comparing it with the peculiarities observable in Thomas's other well-known works. It amounts to almost a new discovery, since none of the former controversialists have, as far as we can ascertain, made any allusion to it. We are indebted for it to Herr Dr. Carolus Hirsche of Hamburg, who has for the first time most accurately rendered the 1441 autograph copy of Thomas à Kempis, marking and disposing it after a new method, so as to bring out a hidden method of composition which Thomas evidently followed in writing the 'De Imitatione,' as he had done also in some of his other principal works,—and shows that there is a peculiar rhythmical punctuation running through the whole, and where the words, in many places, when rearranged in lines, are made to rhyme. And from this we are led to the supposition that

<sup>1</sup> Obsequière, *Dissertation sur l'Auteur*, pp. 46-49.

Thomas à Kempis most frequently set his thoughts down at the first in some sort of verse, and eventually, when re-writing out the work he had in hand as a whole, put it into the shape of prose. This discovery Hirsche has set forth more at length in his *Prolegomena zu einer neuen Ausgabe der IMITATIO CHRISTI nach dem Autograph des Thomas von Kempen*: Berlin. A careful consideration of this new disposition will still further satisfy the reader that there can be little doubt that Thomas à Kempis must have been the author of the book; for if there had been no other evidence forthcoming, this alone of itself would have been most convincing. We must, however, reserve to another chapter any elucidation of what he brings to light.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

*The new Disposition of the Words by Hirsche, showing  
the Composition of the 'De Imitatione.'*

DR. HIRSCHÉ has assured his readers in the Preface to his *Textum ex autographo Thomæ*,<sup>1</sup> that he has religiously followed the manuscript of 1441, excepting in those things which do not essentially belong to the text, such as the corrections and erasures, etc. In this work he has put the whole of the 'De Imitatione' into short and long lines, in such wise as he considers that the rhythm of the words requires it, and he herein also clearly shows how frequently the lines are made to rhyme. It is deeply interesting to notice the many places in which they occur throughout all of the four books, giving a most complete answer to those who would adopt the suggested opinion that the books have been written by different individuals, and satisfactorily assuring us that they must have severally been written by one and the same mind. At the end of the book he gives a table where the last syllables of the lines most abundantly sound alike. It is, as will be seen upon examination, not a complete list by far ;

<sup>1</sup> Published at Berlin, 1874.

for the rhyme crops up in very many other parts, sometimes only in a couple of lines, or in six or eight at a time.

We will now, however, at once give an illustration or two of this peculiarity, which is found in the 'De Imitatione Christi.' And we shall hereby be able to point out some other differences which exist between this 1441 manuscript of Thomas à Kempis, and the many later editions, and even the translations which are now generally in use.

We open the first book, and take the first chapter, and beginning at what he makes his eighteenth line, we have this disposition of the words :—

" Vere alta verba non faciunt sanctum et justum :  
 sed virtuosa vita efficit Deo carum.  
 Opto magis sentire compunctionem :  
 quam scire ejus definitionem.  
 Si scires totam bibliam exterius et omnium philoso-  
 phorum dicta  
 quid totum prodesset sine caritate Dei et gratia ?  
 Vanitas vanitatum et omnia vanitas :  
 præter amare Deum et illi soli servire.  
 Ista est summa sapientia :  
 per contemptum mundi tendere ad regna caelestia.  
 Vanitas igitur est divitias perituras querere :  
 et in illis sperare.  
 Vanitas quoque est honores ambire :  
 et in altum statum se extollere.  
 Vanitas est carnis desideria sequi :  
 et illud desiderare unde postmodum graviter oportet  
 puniri.  
 Vanitas est longam vitam optare :  
 et de bona vita parum curare.  
 Vanitas est presentem vitam solum attendere :  
 et quæ futura sunt non prævidere.

Vanitas est diligere quod cum omni celeritate transit :  
et illic non festinare ubi sempiternum gaudium manet.

Memento illius frequenter proverbii §  
quia non satiatur oculus visu :  
nec auris impletur auditu.  
Stude ergo cor tuum ab amore visibilium abstrahere :  
et ad invisibilia te transferre.  
Nam sequentes suam sensualitatem maculant conscien-  
tiam :  
et perdunt Dei gratiam."

Our other illustration of the new disposition is from  
the next chapter, the second, beginning at that which  
Hirsche makes line 22 :—

"Quanto plus et melius scis :  
tanto gravius inde judicaberis nisi sanctius vixeris.  
Noli ergo extolli de ulla arte vel scientia :  
sed potius time de data tibi notitia.

II. Si tibi videtur quod multa scis et satis bene intel-  
ligis :

scito tamen quia sunt multo plura quæ nescia.

Noli altum sapere :

sed ignorantiam tuam magis fatera.

Quid te vis alicui præferre §

quam plures doctiores te inveniantur,

et magis in lege periti ?

Si vis utiliter aliquid scire et discere :

ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari.

Hæc est altissima et utilissima lectio :

sui ipsius vera cognitio et despectio.

De se ipso nihil tenere,

et de aliis semper bene et alte sentire :

magna sapientia est et perfectio.

Si videres alium aperte peccare,

vel aliqua gravia perpetrare §

non deberes te tamen meliorem æstimare :  
 quia nescis quam diu possis in bono stare.  
 Omnes fragiles sumus :  
 sed tu neminem fragiliorem te ipso tenebis."

This is the end of the second chapter. And thus we might go through the whole of the four books, and perhaps not meet with a chapter in which the rhyme is not found, though not always to the extent we see it in the two instances we have just given. Moreover, it is to be observed that Thomas does not invariably carry out this rhyme continuously, even where it is most abundant; but has exercised his own liberty in doing this, where it could be done conveniently and with advantage.

Now, it is important to notice more attentively this peculiarity in the composition of the 'De Imitatione.' For it is unique, not only in its melody to the general reader, but in its very structure, to those who trace out whence this very uniqueness arises, for it is rarely if ever to be traced in prose writing. You may take up a hundred books in prose, but will fail to find this peculiarity; even though you know that some of these authors have been writers in verse. Take up, for instance, the prose works of Wordsworth, Southey, or Sir Walter Scott, and you will not be able to discover anything of this kind; you will not find that at certain measured distances the words will rhyme, so as, in certain places, to make the last syllables of the words sound alike. This method of writing could not be by chance; the writer must have knowingly endeavoured to find words well suited to express his mean-



ing, and that would nevertheless, at the same time, agree in sounding alike in their terminating syllables. This shows that the author was not only capable of writing verse, and had a predisposition of the mind towards making poetry, but that in writing prose he had employed himself in seeing how far he could beforehand turn his words into verse; and it is probable that in the rough copies—the little books, or slips of paper on which he jotted down his thoughts—these attempts were apparent; but not being concerned to write the whole in verse, he inserted in his prose writing portions which he had made to rhyme. This may account in some measure for the great point, fitness, and simplicity of his words, the short sententious character of the passages, and the easy flowing sound in reading the work, which renders it so attractive. Great pains, it is evident, had been taken with the original composition; and each passage had been well thought over and carefully determined upon.

Now, in the Bourgogne Library at Brussels there is another codex or volume (under the numbers 4585-4587), which contains several other works composed by Thomas à Kempis, and that have been written out with his own hand. The whole of this manuscript is clearly and legibly written in letters a little larger than, but bearing a striking similarity to, the writing in the manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' written by Thomas in 1441. On page 116 there is written this inscription:—*Anno Domini M<sup>o</sup>.CCCC<sup>o</sup>.LVI finitus et scriptus per manus fratris Thomæ Kempensis*; from which it

appears to have been written, or at least finished, about fifteen years after he had written out the fair copy of the 'De Imitatione' which is now extant. As will be seen from the photograph,—a portion of this manuscript, which is here inserted,—there is the concluding part of a hymn set to music, and on the other page is the beginning of one of his prose works. And on looking over the Codex it will be found that, scattered among his prose writings which he has here copied out, there are several sacred hymns of his own composition, which he wrote out and had set to music for the use of the members of his community—the Brotherhood of Common Life, and other devout Christians. The tunes, however, it is thought, have been adapted from some which were in existence at the time.<sup>1</sup> Here, then, we have evidence that Thomas à

<sup>1</sup> The concluding words of the hymn seen in the photographic specimen of the Codex of these other works written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis are taken from the sixth of his *Spiritual Canticles*, and is entitled 'De Dulcedine Jesu, et de plenitudine gratiarum, et omnium virtutum, quas habuit.' A translation of it was made many years ago, which is not altogether satisfactory; but, as it may interest the reader, the whole of the hymn is given in the original Latin. We must not, however, here look for the more polished verse of our poets, perfected by art, but for such as follow the mediæval style, common at that time in such works; and the hymn is valuable as manifesting the fervid devotion to Jesus which shone so conspicuously in the life and writings of Thomas:—

" O Dulcissime Jesu,  
 Qui de cælo descendisti,  
 Et vitam mundo contulisti.  
 Legam de te, scribam de te :  
 Quæram te, cantem de te,  
 Jesu puer dulcissime.  
 Nam suavis es et mitis,  
 Humilis, plenusque virtutibus,  
 Fili Dei altissime.  
 Multum dimittis, multum amanti,  
 Nec postea te deserenti.

O ihesu clarissimū speculū splēdē p totū  
 seculū tu mōn es etn edū Quidm ego dōle  
 rē ihesu mī si nō venisses et agrotū vificas  
 Quē dōlo et gaudēdo. i ihesu dōo nro et  
 serū tuo semp eo I quo reb ihu bēgine  
 et amorē tu igne cordē me ut sēp amē te.

**S**ed de seculo prophetas et deus ipse  
 ergo advenit xpi. Eius pmo  
 ut veniet de siduris actus gen  
 in dēstīnē et auferat omēs pē  
 et dēvotū quōd de xpo loquēd pph  
 illū. Deo nō dēvotū in totū sacro tpe advenit  
 speculū habē mōrū de pphēto itamōrē dī  
 pphēto cōm nobis credie sōz pphēto sēp cū  
 pulā veniēti. Quāt' audita tūc pcedētiā p  
 magis ac magis i amorē xpi itamōrē dēvotū  
 cordē mī accendat. Q' qmō dēstīnō oīz ad  
 sa pcedēdē et pphēto. De sola fūcā gmmfīcō.  
 dēvotū nobis pphēto. si mōrē nūc pphēto  
 ad credēdū xpi in carne pphēto. qm illi sēp arde  
 ad sola oīz itamōrē mōrē. Exultātes ad  
 pphēto omī credēdū vīdēt dēvotū xpi. quē i  
 de sua sēp nō facit pphēto. et gmmfīcō  
 duo nō modico. pphēto cōm sēp quā de xpo m  
 tuo accipit. Similit' aut' et alī mōn dēvotū sē  
 qm frequēti dēstīnōmōrē. qm p sēp hoc  
 uerit. expiētiō tūc magnū amorē ipse mōr  
 q' nō iam gaudēti esse capēt. Ad sēp cū  
 ex dēvotū ostendit. ad pphēto in carne dēstīnō  
 vō aut. et illi vōro et pphēto nō luerit vōro q  
 vōro vōro. et nō vōro. Quā igit' amorē  
 habē ad xpm. quāq' m dēstīnō aut' sēp nō i  
 gmmfīcō. qm dēvotū sēp mōrē qm magnū bē  
 cū sēp collat. q' vōro itamōrē vōro. Ad  
 libere dēvotū dēvotū de se mōrē dēvotū dēvotū  
 dēvotū qm nō dēvotū bēdīcōnē. sēp m  
 dēvotū. quā sēp mōrē nō est xpi. nō sēp

1  
2  
3

4



his did actually write verse, and was thus well occasionally, to introduce words that rhymed into prose works. From the sweet harmony of his style and being in harmony with all around him, he sought to make harmony in his words ; and this proof

Qui te relinquit,  
Heu quid hic facit !  
Qui te invenit,  
Eja quid habet !

Illum protecto tenet et habet,  
Qui cælum terramque ut Deus regit ;  
Ut homo miro modo præsepe ;  
Quasi pauper prælegit.

O venerabile præsepium,  
In quo mundi servatur pretium :  
Nunc latet, nunc patet :  
Tunc sciatur, cum pro multis expenditur.

Hæc sunt debitis fidelis animas,  
Sæpè mente revolvere,

Humilia tua ; Jesu Christo.  
Hæc sunt sanctæ reliquæ pio memoris :  
Quas devote recolere,

In absentia tua vis Domine.  
Jam oportet me gaudere,  
Nam damnatus pro scelere  
Eram et clausus tetro carcere :  
Sed Jesus venit cum claro lumine.

Nudus eram, nec sciebam,  
Claudicabam, et linguebam,  
Et ad me dignatus es descendere.

Jesu clemens et celestis medicos.  
Bone Peter, multum nos amasti,  
Quibus Jesum præparasti,  
Ab æstibus umbraculum.

O Jesu clarissimum speculum,  
Splendens per totum sæculum :

Tu nostrum es remedium  
Quidni ego dolerem  
Jesu mi si non venisses,  
Et ægrotum vintamæ,

Nunc verò et gaudebo,  
In te Jesu Deo meo :

Et servus tuus semper ero.  
Laus tibi Jesu benigne ;  
Et amoris tui igne,  
Accende me  
Ut semper amem te."

of his ability to do that which we find so constantly occurring in all the books of the 'De Imitatione,' predisposes us to conclude—having other evidence as well—that he was the author of the work.

But this evidence is not alone of itself sufficient there is yet other testimony which seems most irresistible on this point. Without being able to refer to Hirsche's larger work in German upon the interesting subject, we became extremely anxious to ascertain whether a similar peculiarity could be traced in any of the other acknowledged writings of the pious Canon. We therefore took up three of the other well-known works of Thomas à Kempis, about which there is no question that he is the author, viz., his *Soliloquium Animæ*, his *Hortulus Rosarum*, and his *Vallis Liliorum*; when—judge of the delight and surprise which the result of the examination of them afforded, for what do we find in them, but this same peculiar method that we have named as traceable in the 'De Imitatione,' viz., a certain rhythm where the writer occasionally makes the words to rhyme at measured distances! We shall produce proofs of this from only the first chapters in each of the books; for a little time in comparing them with the passages taken from the 'De Imitatione' will do more than any lengthened arguments in assuring us that he who composed these composed the other also.

In the first chapter of the *Soliloquium Animæ* we have these passages occurring here and there, which we have put into such lines as will show how and where the rhyme occurs.



*‘Mihi autem adhaerere Deo, bonum est.’<sup>1</sup>*

O breve et dulce verbum,  
Deum amplectens et mundum,  
excludens Universum.  
Quid amplius dicendum,  
et quid ultra cupiendum?  
Nonne satis est,  
Si fiat, quod jam dictum est?

De te cogitare suave est devoto,  
cujus cor non est in mundo;  
sed tecum absconditum in caelo:  
Ut tu sis ei sola vera requies et intima suavitas;  
nec hic crucietur quotidie, ubi tentat falsa cupiditas.  
Deus meus, quomodo est illi in corde,  
qui tuo fervet amore?  
Quale gaudium ejus, quem nulla delectat, creaturarum  
vanitas?

Parva mihi sunt omnia. Quid ergo quaeris?  
Quem vis sine istis?  
et ubi invenies eum sine his?  
Habetne nomen, aut locum,  
aut habitationem, ad quaerendum?

Quid hoc (inquit) quaeris a me,  
aut cur tale aliquid scrutaris apud me?  
Putas, quod tibi talia dicam,  
aut dicere valeam?  
Quod si charitas favet, nonne rei hujus raritas,  
aut etiam secreti profunditas magis dicere prohibet,  
quid me interrogas?  
Sed potius eum interroga,  
qui novit omnia.  
Ipse enim est, de quo fit sermo, qui melius se tibi  
indicabit  
et ubinam habitat, longe clarius demonstrabit.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxxiii. 28.

Is utique est, qui docet hominem scientiam,  
 dat quoque humilibus gratiam suam.  
 Accede ad eum, qui revelat seipsum, cum voluerit,  
 et cui placuerit.  
 Potens est solus revelare tibi gaudium amantium se,  
 et ultra quam potes a me discere.

Quid cunctaris? Satis fac desideranti,  
 et aperi ostium amico, jam tertio pulsanti.  
 Dic dilecta de dilecto,  
 me tamen non neglecto.

Si ergo non sufficis penetrare spiritum tuum,  
 quem creavit Creator et Vivificator omnium spirituum,  
 quomodo penetrabis increatum?  
 Nonne ideo stupens dixisti;  
 'Domine quis similis tibi?'

Noli protrahere sermonem,  
 qui potes cito adhibere consolationem.  
 Quousque animam meam suspendis?  
 Quid dicis, et non dicis?

Jam ergo si vidisti illum, dicito mihi palam,  
 et ego illum tollam."

Here we stop, though we have only got about half way through the first chapter, and have marked many more passages as examples in it, but we have given sufficient instances out of one book of Thomas à Kempis, and we now turn to another; and in examining the *Hortulus Rosarum*, we find in its first chapter—about a fourth the length of the first chapter in the other book—these instances of the peculiarity alluded to:—

"Junge te virtuoso,  
 et discipulato et erudito;

a quo audias semper verbum  
consolatorium et imitatione dignum.

Sic Apostoli adherentes Christo,  
facti sunt viri sancti, repleti Spiritu sancto.

Sic Marcus adherens sancto Petro,  
fit eruditus in Evangelio sancto.  
quod audivit ab ore beati Petri, cum ingenti gaudio.

Sic Timotheus adherens sancto Paulo,  
fit doctus in scripturis sanctis, a juventutis suæ exordio.

A quo postmodum, proficiente Dei gratia, ordinatur  
Episcopus in Epheso,

multum prædilectus ab eo, sicut filius unicus a patre  
charissimo.

Sic sanctus Polycarpus, conjunctus sancto Joanni  
Apostolo,

fit fervidus prædicator fidei in populo,  
et inclytus martyr cum sancto Ignatio.

Sic beatissimus pater noster Augustinus,  
instructus ac baptizatus a sancto Ambrosio Episcopo,  
fit tandem gloriosus doctor sanctæ Ecclesiæ,  
illustrissime jam nominatus in toto mundo.

Sic sanctus juvenis Maurus,  
adherens sancto Benedicto,

fit Deo juvante postea Abbas sanctus,  
virtutibus et miraculis clarus.

Sic Deo dilectus Bernardus,  
adherens venerabili Abbati Stephano in Cisterciensi  
monasterio,

fit lumen religionis in ordine suo,  
et tanquam sydus clarum fulgens in cælo.

Exempla sunt plurima

tam nova quam vetera,  
quia prodest salutis animæ societas bona,  
et nocet conventio prava.

Prodest lectio bona,

nocet auditio mala.

Prodest solitudo cum silentio;

nocet tumultus et vagus discursus in mundo.

Aut igitur esto solus Deo vocando,  
 aut cum socio devoto,  
 de Christi virtutibus conferendo.  
 Cave de altis rebus curiose quærere,  
 stude vitia tua cognoscere,  
 et remedia sana morbis adhibere."

And now for an illustration of the same sort out of the *Vallis Liliorum*, another favourite book written by Thomas à Kempis :—

"Christus enim est speciosus sponsus sanctæ Ecclesiæ,  
 et caput omnium fidelium,  
 flos omnium virtutum,  
 et lilium convallium,  
 amator humilitatis  
 et castitatis.

Qui ergo vult Christo servire,  
 et celesti Sponso placere,  
 studeat vitia sua vincere,  
 lilia virtutem colligere,  
 otium vitare, libenter studere, libros scribere,  
 manibus operari, quod utile est,  
 frequenter orare,  
 et Deo intime vacare,  
 tumultus fugere,  
 secretum diligere,  
 et de alienis rebus et sibi nocivis tacere.

Attende ergo frater statum tuum, in quo stas,  
 et coram hominibus ambulas;  
 ut Deo digne placere studeas . . .

Totum enim in te redundabit, quicquid boni feceris,  
 et quicquid mali, coram Deo commiseris.

Quando ergo comedis et bibis,  
 dormis et quiescis,  
 et quocunque volueris pro libitu tuo transis;  
 tunc facis opera carnis,  
 et assimilaris bestiis terrenis.

Et si quis eis resistit, illum stimulant cornibus et ungulis,  
terrent vultibus, et mordent dentibus et clamant vocibus  
horrendis.

Tales sunt carnales homines gulosi,  
avari, superbi, iracundi et litigiosi;  
Spiritus Dei non habentes,  
sed passiones suas sequentes."

We need not proceed further, though we have not got to the end of the first chapter; for it must be quite apparent that there are abundant examples of this remarkable method of Thomas à Kempis, in writing a species of poetry in his prose works, and incorporating the verses or lines he had evidently previously and studiously considered in the very structure of his works. We find that this peculiarity, which is adopted by Thomas à Kempis in the works of his own composition, is not used by others, or very rarely, and at least has never been found in the works of any of the other individuals to whom the 'De Imitatione' has been attributed. But, on the other hand, we find it, as already stated, scattered up and down in all the books of the 'De Imitatione,' after a much similar manner to what it is in Thomas à Kempis's known writings. What then is the conclusion we must come to? It is certainly this, that Thomas à Kempis is undoubtedly the author of the 'De Imitatione.' We do not see how it is possible to determine otherwise, and we contend that he stands in possession of the field, until it can be shown, not that some isolated instances of the method adopted by Thomas can be drawn from some obscure author or another, but that one of those who are claimed to have

written the 'De Imitatione' has written in a similar manner in some of his other works.

Not only did Thomas à Kempis write the 'De Imitatione' with his own hand, and sign it with his own name and proper address, but he put his own peculiar method into the writing of it, whereby he leaves his own impress or significant mark on every page, and in such a way as to certify that the work was incontestably his composition. It is as if some coloured thread was woven into the texture of the work in some particular way by him, and by the which we are able to recognise any composition of his, and to distinguish it from the works of other men when we meet with it. Here is some workmanship peculiar to Thomas à Kempis, we can say; we find it curiously wrought into the very construction of many of his other works—it is known to be his; and so when we can trace the same deeply interwoven into the composition of the 'De Imitatione,' we cannot but feel that we have a strong guarantee, a specific testimony, that it is without doubt the production of Thomas à Kempis. This evidence arising from the internal characteristic of the writing is, as it must be seen, very weighty in itself, and would alone lead us, in the absence of any other of the claimants being able to produce similar evidence, assuredly to fix upon Thomas à Kempis as the author; but when this evidence is combined with that afforded by Contemporary Witnesses, and other proofs, we do not see what more we need to fully satisfy us about the matter.



But we return to the researches of Hirsche in his examination of this 1441 copy of the 'De Imitatione' written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis. There are certain points which, though not so weighty as the evidence we have just adduced, are deeply interesting, and will add somewhat to the amount of testimony in his favour, though we cannot pursue them fully.

First, there is some difference to be observed between the 1441 manuscript of Thomas à Kempis and the copies of the 'De Imitatione' now in general use, in the division or internal arrangement of the chapters. The copies of the 'De Imitatione' which are now printed are divided either into *paragraphs* or into *short verses*; but whence did this disposition and division of passages arise? The autograph copy of Thomas 1441 has neither these paragraphs as they now appear, nor the versicles; other Codex manuscripts also, which have as yet been made known, are wanting in them, and the editions and versions also printed in the fifteenth century have them not. Now it appears from what can be learnt, that Henricus Sommaliius, whose first edition of the 'De Imitatione' was published at the close of the sixteenth century, was the first who made this new division of the chapters into paragraphs.<sup>1</sup> The division into versicles

<sup>1</sup> Anno 1599. Afterwards it was frequently repeated. The same division has been used in the second edition, which has this inscription: "De Imitatione Christi libri quatuor, auctore Thoma à Kempis, Canonico regulari, ordinis D. Augustini: ad autographum emendati, operi ac studio Henrici Sommalii. e Societate Jesu."—Hirsche, Pref. v, vi. From which it appears that he had attempted to improve upon the 1441 autograph copy of Thomas à Kempis.

was undertaken afterwards by some other editors in the seventeenth century. But Hirscho intimates that this division is very miserable. He uses even stronger language than the changes seem to warrant, when he would have us to understand that nothing is more perverse than the paragraphs of Sommalius,—which mostly remained without any change in all the editions of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries,—nor than the versicles, which is approved, if not in all, yet in many, editions and translations. Nevertheless he intimates that there is some ground for this strong language. For in that partitioning of the chapters, which, he says, you may rightly call laceration, this has been effected, viz., that the connection of the sentences, which ought to serve the purpose of illustration, is altogether obscured in very many places, hence the sense is rendered somewhat indistinct, so that the members or portions of the chapters which most skilfully adhere together are sometimes disjointed. Thomas himself in his own autograph has frequently indicated what was done, and is even now done, while neglecting these significations, when he shows after what manner he would dispose or divide the chapter. It is true that Thomas uses certain divisions in his chapters, but as Hirscho shows, it is, in nearly every chapter, diverse, and generally very different from the divisions now in use. It will be observed that where Thomas gives two titles to his chapters, there he usually divides it simply into two parts; and where there is only one title to the chapter, there is a more clear and definite purpose in

the divisions made by Thomas than in those of Sommalius and those who have followed him. To explain this point, and to show the difference between the two methods of division, a few examples may suffice, though, by the way, Hirsche has taken the trouble to point out the difference in every chapter throughout all the four books, between the divisions of Thomas and those of Sommalius, whilst he further intimates the design which Thomas had for severally making his divisions.

In the first chapter of the first book there are two titles; the one is, "On the Imitation of Christ;" the other, "On the Contempt of all the Vanities of the World." Now Sommalius makes five paragraphs in this chapter; Thomas, however, has only two parts, which answer to the two titles of the chapter, the one part treating of the following of Christ, and the other on despising the vanities of the world, which is very concise and obvious. Sommalius doubtless thought that he could make a further and better division, and therefore broke the chapter up into smaller portions, but this is not the method adopted by Thomas à Kempis. Take another chapter with two titles,—say the eleventh, where the heading runs, "On the obtaining of Peace," and "On the zealous Desire to grow in Grace." Thomas à Kempis accordingly divides this chapter under these two subjects—in the first part he speaks about acquiring peace; in the other about making eager proficiency in grace. Sommalius, however, divides this chapter into six parts or paragraphs; and there is doubtless some division, or individuality of

thought to be traced in them, and which might be carried still further, for there is a completeness of thought mostly to be found even in each versicle; but Thomas does not mark out such divisions either in the one or other case. In the chapters with one title, a difference between the two methods exists quite as great as where there are two titles. Thus, in the second chapter, from which we have already given a quotation, Thomas again makes two parts. The title is, "On thinking Humbly of Ourselves," and consequently the first part clearly treats of those things which ought to move men to think humbly of themselves; the second teaches us by what means it is possible for men to think thus humbly of themselves. This is a very plain and natural division of his subject. Sommalius, however, here again makes four paragraphs, and what is more, he seems to have paid little attention to what was indicated by Thomas à Kempis; for Sommalius commences his third paragraph four lines before Thomas begins his second part; this the reader will perceive upon referring to the portion of the second chapter of the 'De Imitatione' which has been already quoted from Thomas à Kempis's autograph copy, as rearranged in lines so as better to distinguish the rhyme.

But Thomas does not always confine himself to a division of his chapters into two parts only; sometimes his matter, or the method of handling his subject, requires more, and we find a further division introduced, as in chapter xiii. Book i., the title of which is, "On Resisting Temptations," and in this

there are no less than six parts ; Sommalius, however, seems not content with this, though it appears to be broken into parts enough, but must mark out eight paragraphs. His first paragraph stops at the end of the first division made by Thomas, which is to show that temptations are indissolubly bound up with human life. But here Sommalius parts company with Thomas. They however meet again at the end of the sixth division, and once more at the end of the chapter.

These instances will give the reader some idea of the difference there is between the copies of the '*De Imitatione*' now in use, which mostly follow Sommalius's division, even where they introduce the versicles, and that of the autograph copy of Thomas à Kempis, in the division of the several subjects upon which he writes. And this attention to the division of the chapters is of some importance to those who wish to see the subject in the same light as that in which the author wrote it, as it is some help to any one endeavouring to comprehend the force of what he says more clearly, to be able to get a right view of the *order* or divisions which he adopts in the matter he treats upon.

Another point to be noticed, which enables us the better to gather in the sense of the author's words, is to observe the *punctuation* of the sentences as he gives them. It is obvious that none could know better than the author of a book what he designs to express ; and if we would fully understand his meaning, and those finer and scarce perceptible turns which give out the



spirit, the force, and fire of the writer's mind, it is very needful that we pay some attention to the pauses, whether short or long, in reading his work. The '*De Imitatione*' has evidently been written with the deepest thoughtfulness, and great care has been taken fully to express what is in the author's mind. He has considered well his words, and striven hard, and by repeated corrections, clearly to set forth the conceptions of his inmost soul, so that they may be fully comprehended by his readers; it is important, then, to notice the little marks and signs by which he would more clearly and powerfully make known his ideas.

Now Sommalius, and consequently those who have followed him in the editions which have been printed, have neglected, to a great extent, these signs, and adopted those which seem in their view to express the meaning of the writer. And it must be observed that this distinction of the sense of the words by marks or stops is, by Hirsche, considered even greater between Sommalius and the author of the '*De Imitatione*' than that which exists in the disposition of the chapters. Both Sommalius and Rosweyde, in their several prefaces, profess that they have recounted faithfully the text of the autograph copy of Thomas à Kempis, but it is clear, says Hirsche, that they have not everywhere preserved the integrity of the autograph; not only in altering some of the words slightly here and there, but more particularly in changing the notation of the sentences. In the new disposition of the words by Hirsche, which follows the 1441 autograph copy of



Thomas à Kempis in all essential points, the punctuation of the sentences as made by Thomas is accurately marked. It is indeed the punctuation of Thomas which is the warrant or ground for dividing the passages into long or short lines, and whereby an insight is gained into the rhythm of the sentences.

We take a passage that will illustrate what has been said, and will serve in some measure to indicate the mode of punctuation adopted by Thomas, to which we purpose to draw further attention. The example will here be given in English, in order that it may be more readily compared with the same passage as taken from copies of the 'De Imitatione' generally in use.

The passage is from the second book and third chapter.

"Keep thyself first in peace:  
and then shalt thou be able to make peace among others.  
A peaceable man does more good:  
than a very learned man.  
A passionate man draweth even good into evil:  
and more easily believes what is bad.  
A good man is peaceful:  
and turneth all things to good.  
He who is in peace:  
is not suspicious of any.  
But he who is discontented and troubled:  
is agitated with various suspicions.  
He is neither quiet himself:  
nor suffereth he others to live quietly.  
He often says that which he ought not to say:  
and omits that which it is more expedient for him to do.  
He considers what others are bound to do:  
and neglects that which he himself is bound to do.

Have therefore first a careful zeal over thyself:  
and then mayest thou justly show thyself zealous of thy  
neighbour.

<sup>1</sup> Thou knowest well how to excuse and colour thine own  
deeds:

but thou art not willing to receive the excuses of others.  
It were more just,  
that thou shouldst accuse thyself:  
and excuse thy brother.  
If thou wilt be borne with:  
bear also with another.

<sup>2</sup> II. Behold how far off thou art yet from true charity  
and humility:

which knoweth not how to be angry or indignant with  
any,

unless against the man himself.

It is no great matter to associate with the good and  
gentle:

for this is naturally pleasing to all;

and every one willingly would have peace:

and loveth those best that agree with him.

But to live peaceably with hard and perverse or disorderly  
persons:

is a great grace and very laudable,

and a manly thing to do.

<sup>3</sup> III. There are some that keep themselves in peace:  
and are in peace also with others.

And there are those who neither have peace:

nor suffer others to live in peace.

They are troublesome to others:

but always more troublesome to themselves.

And there are some who retain peace in themselves:

and study to bring others back to peace.

<sup>1</sup> Here the second paragraph of Sommalius begins.

<sup>2</sup> Here Part II. in the manuscript of Thomas a Kempis commences.

<sup>3</sup> Here both the third paragraph of Sommalius's edition and Part III. of Thomas's manuscript begins.

And yet our whole peace in this miserable life consisteth rather in humble endurance:  
than in not suffering things that are contrary.  
He who knows best how to suffer:  
will keep himself the better in peace.  
That man is conqueror of himself      and lord of the  
world:  
the friend of Christ      and an heir of heaven."

By observing the punctuation in this new disposition of the words by Hirsche, it will be seen that the passages are broken up into shorter sentences than even the versicles, which have been adopted in many editions. And we hereby are the better enabled to note those pauses in reading the 'De Imitatione' which the author made for his readers, whereby they might the more easily and clearly perceive and draw out the meaning and force of his words. A similar disposition of words has been employed in some of the editions of Bishop Andrewes's Private Devotions; and it has its advantages; for where there is no attempt to fill up the lines, when but two or three words will convey to the mind something worth pondering upon, the eye catches the signal for reflection, and the reader is led to consider the meaning more attentively.

There are four or five marks of punctuation used by Thomas which must be noticed, as one or two of them are somewhat peculiar, though the others are well known. Moreover, it is to be observed that the punctuation is found very frequently in other places than those in the editions that follow Sommalius or Rosweyde, and that two of the pauses often used by writers in these days are rarely found. We may

remark also, that whilst Thomas uses the sign of interrogation, he rarely or never makes the sign of exclamation or admiration. Where the shortest pause is made Thomas uses what is called a full stop (.); but we must notice that after it we find the small letter used in beginning the next word, and not a capital letter. The full stop is however also used to denote the longest period for pausing, but after it we find Thomas à Kempis uses a large letter to begin the next sentence with. In order however to prevent any confusion between the two in the reader's mind, Hirsche, having explained this point, always renders the shortest pause by a comma (,), as is usually done, and just as it will be found in the several passages, both in the Latin and English, which we have quoted to show the new disposition. Then there are two other marks used by Thomas: the sign of the colon (:), which with Thomas indicates a little longer delay than the comma; no semicolon is used, but another kind of punctuation somewhat like that of the interrogation turned round, thus (?), which warns us that a still longer delay must be made, but not equal to the full stop (.).

With this explanation the reader will be able to judge more accurately respecting the pauses and punctuations in the autograph copy of Thomas; and to contrast them with those copies of the '*De Imitatione*' which are now in use. Hirsche, who has made a great study of the autograph copy of Thomas à Kempis, speaks of these marks and signs as exceedingly admirable, and very helpful in arriving at the

very thoughts of the author.<sup>1</sup> There are other points named, upon which it is here unnecessary to enter. There are some things, however, in which Hirsche, in his copy of the autograph of Thomas, does not follow him. First, he does not mark where the erasures and corrections have been made. Secondly, there are several words abbreviated or in contracted forms, used by Thomas, which, he says, he does not transfer to his edition lest he should give offence. And thirdly, he does not retain the order of the four books as in the autograph of Thomas, where the fourth book takes the place of the third book in the edition of the '*De Imitatione*' now in use.

Sufficient has been said nevertheless to show that there are a few particular points in which the editions of the '*De Imitatione*' now in use differ somewhat from the method adopted by Thomas à Kempis in the manuscript written by him in 1441, when it passed from his hands in mature life. We need not institute a search among his other writings to ascertain whether these finer shades and marks in the work of composition exist, for they are of such a character as will not apply to our argument with sufficient force to detain us. We are quite content to rest satisfied with the discovery which Hirsche has made of a certain degree of rhythm in the '*De Imitatione*,' and which more especially abounds in those places where the lines are found to rhyme; and that this peculiarity, which is found deeply permeating the '*De Imitatione*,' is equally traceable in some of the other well-known

<sup>1</sup> *Textum ex Autographo Thomæ*, pref. ix.

works of the pious Canon. We do not care to take up any nicer points, lest we dissipate the force of this, which is so apparent to those who will give the least attention to it, and which proves in a most conclusive way the identity of the composition of the 'De Imitatione' with Thomas's other writings, showing that this singular substratum, if we may apply the term, is observable in the one as well as in the other works.

We have only to observe, in conclusion, that Hirsche, to whom we are indebted for this discovery in the composition of the 'De Imitatione,' and the setting of it forth in a new disposition of the 1441 manuscript written by Thomas, says, that he has hardly any doubt but that those who have well considered with him what he has studied to expound and demonstrate, will agree with him that the origin of the 'De Imitatione' must now be referred to none other than to Thomas à Kempis.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Textum ex Autographo Thomæ, 1441. Preface.*



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### *The Manuscripts in favour of Thomas à Kempis continued.*

WE now proceed to consider some of the other manuscripts brought forward in support of the cause of Thomas à Kempis. The *fourth* is one which M. Weigl calls the second of INDERSDORF, and bears this inscription: "*Tractatus qui intitulatur de Imitatione Christi; compilavit quidam canonicus regulæ S<sup>u</sup> Augustini episcopi.*" This manuscript is dated 1441. The Canon-Regular of whom he speaks cannot be otherwise than Thomas à Kempis.<sup>1</sup>

V. The *fifth* manuscript of the '*De Imitatione*,' and which contains the four books of the '*De Imitatione*' in folio, existed formerly in the monastery of POLLINGEN where Amort lived; it was without date, but there is another treatise evidently written with the same hand—for the character of the letters is similar—where the year 1442 is noted down. It has this inscription: "*Explicit libellus de Imitatione Christi editus, ut dicitur, a quodam Canonico Regulari in*

<sup>1</sup> M. de Grégoy, *Hist. du liv. de l'Imit.*, i. 185; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 106.

monasterio Pödiken, Paderbournensis diocesis Provinciae Coloniensis."<sup>1</sup>

The copyist attests the renown of the individual to whom the 'De Imitatione' was attributed as a Canon-Regular; but he deceives himself by the particular circumstance of place, which he was ignorant of in his solitude, being distant from the province where the book had been copied. Yet it can only apply to Thomas à Kempis, because he is ever spoken of as the Canon-Regular.

VI. The *sixth* manuscript we shall name is that of the monastery of ROTTENBUECH in Upper Bavaria, which is inhabited by Canons-Regular. It was written about the year 1440; but since we do not come at this date, as it will be seen, except by collateral evidence, we have placed it after the Pollingen manuscript of 1442, so that, giving a margin of two or three more years, we may safely decide upon this particular period for its being written. The fact is that in order to invalidate its authority the opponents of Thomas à Kempis endeavour to give it an earlier date, so as to bring it to a time when it was not likely for Thomas à Kempis to have composed the book. The manuscript has these words at the end: "Viri egregii Thomæ montis S. Agnetis in Trajecto Regularis Canonici libri de Imitatione Christi numero quatuor." Here we have the name of the author inscribed on the manuscript containing the four books of the 'De Imitatione'; it is that of Thomas of Mount St. Agnes, Canon-Regular, in the diocese of Utrecht, which without

<sup>1</sup> *Amort, Scutum Kempense*, p. 23.

doubt is Thomas à Kempis. But the date does not appear upon it, and is arrived at in another manner. The Gersenists try to fix the date of it at 1402, when our author was only twenty-two years old, and might not be expected at this early period to have written a book of such deep spiritual wisdom. The last word of the inscription given above is contracted after this form, 807, which, it is contended, should be rendered 1402, the number of the year in which it was written, and not *quatuor*, the number of the books of the 'De Imitatione.' Heserus, however, in his *Hecatomphyl*, contends that they render this contracted form wrongly, and gives satisfactory proof to convince every one that it is designed for the word "quatuor." For he states that Michael, the Provost of the monastery of Rottenbuech, sent for his inspection, with the greatest goodwill, the Codex containing the manuscript, "full of venerable antiquity," and that his mind had been but lately impressed with the idea that the cause of Thomas suffered very little from it. "I have inspected it," he says, "and truly it must be so read, as we read the twenty-third chapter of Book III.," the heading of which has the same contracted form, and is written by the same hand as wrote the inscription, and is as follows, "De 807 magnam importantibus pacem," which must evidently be translated thus, "On the *four* things which bring in great peace." For it would be preposterous to make the contraction used here, as it is suggested in the inscription to signify, "On 1402 things which bring in great peace." As it therefore cannot be thus rendered in this place, neither can it be

rendered in the inscription as signifying 1402. But as in the heading of the twenty-third chapter, Book III., it refers to the four things which greatly contribute to peace, as set forth in the chapter, so in the inscription it undoubtedly signifies the number *four*, in allusion to the number of the books of the 'De Imitatione.' Nothing can be more simple than what is here said and believed.

"I add," says Amort, who has given the above statement from Heserus, "that I have myself seen this Codex, and I have thoroughly ascertained that it was written about the year 1440. Because the treatise in the same Codex which immediately precedes the four books of the 'De Imitatione' has the year 1439 affixed to it. And lest any one should suspect that there is another more ancient Codex in the monastery of Rottenbuech, I have myself been there, and examined with much care all the manuscript books thereof, and I have not found another. I have also gone through the Catalogue of all the manuscripts in the Electoral Library written up to the year 1610, and there is no other Codex except the one already alluded to. I happened also," continues Amort, "in the meantime, to come upon the autograph letters of Michael the Provost of Rottenbuech to Anthony, the Prior of Diessen, and to Heserus, which were written on the matter of this Codex. In one of these Michael confesses that there was not another manuscript of the books of the 'De Imitatione' in the monastery except that one extant."<sup>1</sup> Therefore it is certain that the supposition

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 25, 6, 7; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 107.

of a manuscript being found there of the date of 1402 cannot be established ; but that on the contrary there is one well authenticated in favour of Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione,' written about the year 1440.

VII. The *seventh* manuscript we put in evidence is that in the seminary of LIÈGE, copied in 1445 from the autograph of Thomas à Kempis twenty-six years before the death of our author ; as M. Bormans, a distinguished Professor of the University of Liège, and a member of the Royal Academy, has endeavoured to prove.<sup>1</sup>

VIII. We now give another manuscript, found in the monastery of the Carthusians at COLOGNE, written in 1447 ; that is, twenty-four years before the death of Thomas à Kempis. The Codex contains divers treatises, an index of which at the beginning of the book is as follows :—" 1. Speculum Henrici de Hassia. 2. Liber de discretione spirituum ejusdem. 3. Aliqua opuscula cujusdam devoti Regularis (some one has here placed in the margin 'Cujus nomen est Thomas Kempis conventus prope Swollis'), de Sacramento altaris : de septem rebus, quæ placent Deo in suis electis ; Breviloquium exercitiorum spiritualium ; Tractatus de virtutibus ; Soliloquium Animæ, in forma Dialogi, libellus, qui appellatur, Qui sequitur me." Thus it is in the index ; at the end of the book on the

<sup>1</sup> *Notice sur un manuscrit de Thomas à Kempis appartenant au séminaire de Liège*, par M. Bormans, professeur à l'Université de cette ville, insérée dans le *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'histoire*, t. x. p. 156 ; Bruxelles, 1843. Malou, *Recherches*, pp. 107.



Sacrament these words are added: "Hic tractatus scriptus est anno 1447, in die Simonis et Judæ."<sup>1</sup>

This Codex was produced by the Canons-Regular before the learned authorities in Paris convened for the purpose of examining into the question of the authorship of the 'De Imitatione' in the year 1681. It must be observed that the first two treatises of the Codex, and the last, which is the first book of the 'De Imitatione,' are written differently from the writing of the other treatises therein contained; and that the marginal note also is by a more recent hand.<sup>2</sup> The date of 1447 is however clearly affixed to one of the treatises, which form one of the four books of the 'De Imitatione.' And there can be little doubt that, by the expression "of a certain devout Regular," Thomas à Kempis is sufficiently indicated, when applied to the fact of his writing, not only some of the books of the 'De Imitatione,' but also the *Soliloquy of the Soul*, which is an acknowledged work of his. Thomas himself, when speaking of the Canons-Regular, very frequently applies this term of "Regular" to them: thus, for example, in Serm. 6, ad Novit. n. 6, he says,—"*Fuit quidam frater in Ordine Regularium;*" and in Serm. 13, n. 10,—"*Quidam frater Regularis Ordinis;*" and in Serm. 14, n. 11,—"*Fuit quidam frater in Ordine Regularium.*" The marginal note, written posterior to that of the Codex itself, simply explains and confirms what the copyist had indicated. The state of the manuscript shows this, and affords a distinct testimony

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 25; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Dupin, *Bibl. Eccles.*, t. 22, diss. § 3.



that the books of the 'De Imitatione' were indubitably written by Thomas à Kempis.

IX. The *ninth* manuscript is that of the Chartreuse of BRUSSELS, dated 1451 and 1463.<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is now in the Bourgogne Library at Brussels, and numbered 2584-2589, and is written by the hand of Brother de Baenst. The books of the 'De Imitatione' are found in the following order:—the 3d, the 2d, the 1st, and the 4th. The 3d book, which is at the head of the Codex, bears the date 1463, and ends thus:—"Explicit devotus Tractatus cujusdam Regularis de Interna locutione ad animam fidelem, scriptus in anno 1463, et pertinet ad Carthusienses domus Sylvæ S. Martini prope Geraldî montem;"<sup>2</sup> but the three other books have the date 1451. The order of the books is singular, and cannot be accounted for, unless it arose from the preference or need that the copyist had for them, as he wrote them out. Whatever was the reason for it however, the manuscript bears testimony to the authorship of the 'De Imitatione' belonging to Thomas à Kempis, as designated in the title "Regular."

All the manuscripts hitherto adduced in testimony of the claim of Thomas à Kempis, it should be observed, are of anterior dates, by several years, to any that can be produced and satisfactorily proved in favour of either Gersen or Gerson. There are, moreover, several other manuscripts of this century—the fifteenth—supporting the claim of Thomas à Kempis, bearing

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 132; Malou, *Recherches*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Dupin, *Bibl. Eccl.*, tom. xii. § 3; Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 26.

very valuable testimony. We shall enumerate them very briefly, except in those instances where there are peculiar circumstances which tend to give greater weight to the authenticity of their evidence.

X. The *tenth* manuscript is that of VIENNA, having the date 1467.<sup>1</sup>

XI. The *eleventh* manuscript is that of BUXHEM, in Swabia, with the date of 1471.<sup>2</sup> This was the very year in which Thomas died.

XII. The *twelfth* manuscript is that of AFFLICHEM, with the date of 1471 also.<sup>3</sup>

XIII. The *thirteenth* manuscript to be brought forward is the Codex DALHEIMENSIS, written in the year 1471 also. This manuscript was brought from the house of St. Peter and St. Anthony, Dalheim, and produced before the learned in Paris, A.D. 1681. In the Codex there are some extracts found from the work of Hugo, entitled *De Claustro Animæ*, written in 1475. Moreover, it is to be noticed that the book of the 'De Imitatione' is under the title *Tractatus de Contemptu Mundi*. At the end these words are found written by another hand :—"Explicit libellus de Contemptu mundi, quem fecit frater Thomas à Kempis, Professus in Monte Agnetis Ordinis Canoniorum Regularium. Obiit ætatis sue anno 90. In ordine devotus 65. Requiescat in perpetua pace, pro quo debitum solvi anno 1471. Cosmæ et Damiani, quo anno obiit." This is peculiarly valuable testimony in support of the claims of Thomas à Kempis to be the

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 133, and Grégory, *Hist. de l'Imit.*, i. p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.*, p. 153. <sup>3</sup> Grégory, *Hist. de l'Imit.*, i. p. 251.

author, and therefore requires a word or two in passing. There is first a direct and positive assertion that Thomas was the author of the 'De Contemptu Mundi,' which is another title for the 'De Imitatione Christi.' The writer notes also the age of Thomas when he died, and also the number of years he had been in the Order of St. Augustine. Moreover, he notes the time, when out of love and friendship for Thomas, he performed mass for him at two places; and it seems that this memorandum, which he wrote upon the manuscript, must have been placed there at the time when he did this, or soon afterwards, and not long after the death of Thomas: and we shall not be far wrong in supposing that it was written by one who was of the same Confraternity, and had known him intimately and loved him dearly, if even he did not live in the same monastery with him at Mount St. Agnes.<sup>1</sup>

XIV. We now produce another manuscript respecting which we cannot pass by without a few words also. It is the Codex DUNENSIS, written before the year 1472. It appears that a Catalogue of the manuscripts of the church of Dun is carefully preserved by the Canons-Regular, in which this important declaration is to be found:—"Item in eodem armariolo servatur alius Catalogus duplex in octavo, scilicet dumi B. M. apud Endoviam, et Fontis B. M. Arnheim, scriptus anno 1472 in quo sic legitur: '*Thomas de Kempis Canonici Regularis devota exercitia. Idem. DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI. QUI SEQUITUR. Idem de interna locutione. Ejusdem Alphabetum. Ejusdem Dialogus ad*

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 27; Dupin, i. p. 200.

*digne celebrandum.*" And it is further noted in the margin, "*Hos libellos extare in diversis Bibliothecis Belgii.*" This evidence assures us that, not only at Dun, but in the monasteries of Belgium, in the vicinity of which Thomas à Kempis himself lived, it was the generally received opinion that he was the author. The '*De Imitatione Christi*' is here enumerated along with some of Thomas's other writings. The number of copies alluded to under this *Codex* greatly strengthens the evidence here brought forward.<sup>1</sup>

XV. The *fifteenth* manuscript is that of GRIES in the Tyrol, dated 1474.<sup>2</sup>

XVI. The *sixteenth* manuscript is that of MAESEYE, dated 1477.<sup>3</sup>

XVII. The *seventeenth* manuscript produced is dated 1482, and found in the monastery of the Canons-Regular of St. Martin, LOUVAIN. It was brought forward and examined by the learned men in Paris in 1681, and found in a perfect condition, and was assumed to have been untampered with. It contains, in the first place, the "*Hortulus Rosarum*," which is an acknowledged work of Thomas à Kempis. Then follow the books of the '*De Imitatione*,' viz., 1st, 4th, and 3d, omitting the 2d. At the end of the book, in the same hand, is written:—"Expliciunt Tractatus quatuor Thomæ de Kempis, devoti et interni, scripti et ligati per manus Fr. Simonis Jacobi de Leydis professi in Leydendorff, pro tunc socii Rectoris hujus Monas-

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 27; Dupin, i. p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Moral. Cert.* See No. 18 of his facsimiles.

<sup>3</sup> Fronteau, *Refutatio Eorum*, p. 74; Grégory, *Hist. de l'Imit.*, i. p. 254.

terii Sanctimonialium antiquarum in Amstrelodan. Anno Domini 1482."<sup>1</sup>

Here then is a writer again, within eleven or twelve years of the death of Thomas à Kempis, who, having copied out the four books of the 'De Imitatione,' distinctly asserts that they are his production. The transcriber gives his name, profession, and place of residence, with the date; so that there might be no secret about the statement; as much as if he had said, 'I am to be found here, to vouch for the truth of what I have stated;' and the Codex in which this evidence is found is admitted to be of undoubted authority by competent and impartial judges. What more can we need for honest minds seeking the truth alone? This testimony might very well have come in among the Contemporary Witnesses.

XVIII. The *eighteenth* manuscript is that of HOBENDORF, with the date 1487.<sup>2</sup> Amort, however, gives an earlier date to this manuscript by twenty years, bringing it within the lifetime of Thomas; moreover, he gives us the exact words of the testimony concerning it, which gives us the greater confidence in his statement. He says, that D. Raymond Duelli—a most notable man in the literary world—wrote letters to him, dated 1725, concerning this manuscript, in which he states:—

"Vidi ego Codicem ms. in Bibliotheca Hobendorfiana, quam nuper Caesar auxit, sæculo 15, exaratum, in cujus fronte Thomas habitu Canonici Regularis ejusdem ævi manu depictus

<sup>1</sup> Dupin, *Bibl. Ecclæ.*, t. 12, § 2 and 4; Amort, *Scutum Kempenæ*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory, *Hist. de l'Instit.*, i. p. 253.



sistitur : sequuntur verba : *Incipit Liber I. F. Thomæ de Kempis Canonici Regularis Ordinis S. Augustini, 'de Imitatione Christi' et 'contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi.'* In fine legitur :—*F. Thomas de Kempis, 'de Imitatione Christi' de quo Contemptu mundi' devotum et utile opusculum finit feliciter ;* Codex membranaceus est in quarto ubi charta vaga ita habet. Ce manuscrit a appartenu à Messire Baudoin de Lannoy Seigneur de Molambais, fait Chevalier de Toison D'or, an. 1467."

Amort assures us, that these letters are from a most trustworthy friend.<sup>1</sup> This testimony might very well also have been placed among the Contemporary Witnesses, and gives valuable support to the claims of Thomas à Kempis.

XIX. Our nineteenth manuscript is another document from the same place as the manuscript numbered xvii.—the monastery of the Canons-Regular of St. Martin's, LOUVAIN. This, like the former manuscript, was also laid before the learned assembly in Paris in 1681, to be approved of by them, and taken in evidence to support the claims of Thomas. It is, however, a very different kind of manuscript, and of such combined weight, that Amort<sup>2</sup> numbers it not only 17, but 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22, as if it contained six independent testimonies to establish the right of Thomas à Kempis, as the author of the 'De Imitatione.' The document is a Catalogue of the books and manuscripts in the various libraries of Belgium, written about the year 1487. This Catalogue affirms that the books of the 'De Imitatione,' under the name of Thomas à Kempis, are preserved in five monasteries ; and truly the Catalogue itself may be considered as a sixth testi-

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 26, 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.



mony to prove the claim. The Catalogue is a public document, and contains these words :—

"Item in eodem armariolo alius liber valde antiquus ms. in oblonga forma, qui est Catalogus multorum Manuscriptorum in diversis Bibliothecis Belgii extantium, in quo inter alia opera Thomæ à Kempis ponuntur *libelli quatuor 'de Imitatione,'* cum annotatione principii et finis cujusque libri . . . notaturque in margine, eos extare in Campo B. Mariæ monasterio Ordinis Cisterciensis prope Bercam. In Monasterio Guesdunck Ordinis Can. Reg. apud Gog. In Monasterio S. Catharinæ apud Noviomagnum; et valle S. Martini Lovanii. et Endoviæ in duno."

The same Catalogue has also these words on page 302 :—

"Frater Thomas de Kempis diocesis Coloniensis, Canonicus Regularis in Monte S. Agnetis prope Swollam diocesis Trajectensis versatus in S. Scriptura compilavit plures parvos tractatus testes suæ devotionis, et utiles pro religiosis, videlicet, Exhortationes ad vitam spiritualem; alias '*de Imitatione Christi;*' '*Admonitiones ad vitam internam trahentes.*' '*De Consolatione seu locutione interna.*' '*De Communione Sacra.*'"<sup>1</sup>

Now, it will be noticed, all the four books of the '*De Imitatione*' are named in the Catalogue, and in the order we have them at present, and attributed to Thomas à Kempis. The Catalogue was submitted to a searching examination before a critical tribunal; and its probable date affixed from the mention of other works which it contains. And this other fact must be borne in mind also, that all the five manuscripts of the '*De Imitatione*' in the several monasteries named must of necessity be of older dates than the Catalogue,

<sup>1</sup> Dupin, i. cc, and Hoeser in *Hecatom.*; Amort, *Scutum Kempnæ*, p. 28.

and have been written some time before it : so that they were all written nearer to the time of Thomas à Kempis—perhaps some of them in his lifetime, none of them more than a few years after his death. Such testimony as this is well-nigh irresistible in its combined force, and will speak for itself.

Here, then, we shall close our evidence from the manuscripts which bear the name of the author of the 'De Imitatione,' and have a certain date, or that have some particular circumstances connected with them, which render their evidence incontestable, and all within a brief period of his death, whilst many of the earlier ones were written during his lifetime, some of them thirty or forty years before his death.

But let it not be for one moment supposed that what we have hitherto produced is all the evidence in the category of manuscripts that can be brought forth in support of Thomas à Kempis being the author of the 'De Imitatione.' There are yet a great number without date, which attribute the work to him.

The most remarkable is that which the Canons-Regular of St. Martin, Louvain, had inherited from the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, where Thomas lived the greater part of his life. It is evidently written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, as may be seen by comparing it with other works known to have been written by him ; and contains the fourth book of the 'De Imitatione' in a state of rough draft.<sup>1</sup> Amort

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 137. There is, in the same monastery at Louvain, the Missal written by the hand of Thomas à Kempis, A.D. 1417. The handwriting in the manuscript containing the books of the 'De Imitatione' is very similar to this, it is said, when compared together. The character of the

states further that Johannes Ulimmerius, Prior of the Canons-Regular of St. Martin, Louvain, testified before several witnesses that this manuscript Codex of the books of the 'De Imitatione' had, many years before, been received from the Canons-Regular of Mount St. Agnes, who affirmed that it had been written by the hand of the very author himself, Thomas à Kempis, and that they had received it as such by unvarying tradition from the older brethren of the monastery. In the first folio of the Codex these words are written : — "*Hic liber est scriptus manu et characteribus Reverendi et Religiosi Patris Thomas à Kempis Canonici Regularis in Monte S<sup>i</sup> Agnetis prope Subollam, qui est author horum devotorum libellorum.*" Here, then, we have direct testimony upon the point in question. It is true there is no date to the manuscript, but it is peculiarly valuable notwithstanding, inasmuch as we have here the very handwriting of Thomas, if not the protographs of the books of the 'De Imitatione,' found in the midst of other little works written by him ; and over and above this we have the tradition of the monastery of Mount St. Agnes, from which place the

letters is the same. The Missal has the usual formula *Per manus fratris Thomae* etc. The other manuscript, not having this formula or other of the copyist, is incomplete. Thomas was ordained a priest in 1413, and it is thought by some of his admirers that he must have written the book 'De Sacramento,' the fourth book of the 'De Imitatione,' soon after this ; for, in the fifth chapter of this book, as if speaking of a fact recently accomplished, *Eccc Sacerdos factus es, etc. . . . Non alleviasti onus tuum, etc.* Thus, with the other circumstances named, lead the advocates of Thomas à Kempis to the supposition that between the time of his ordination and the year 1420 he had completed the writing of all the four books of the 'De Imitatione : ' it is probable that he had commenced, if not completed, one or other of the books when he entered the priesthood, for he was then in the matured prime of his faculties, being about thirty-three years of age.

Canons brought away with them this Codex to Ulimerius, as the greatest treasure of their monastery. when, about the year 1570—that is, nearly a hundred years after the death of Thomas, being expelled by the Belgian Confederation, they took refuge with the Canons-Regular at Louvain. Does not this Codex alone, concludes Amort, establish a presumption morally certain for Thomas à Kempis?¹

Another circumstance which leads the friends of Thomas to consider the manuscript to be one of the oldest, if not the oldest—older than the oldest dated manuscript, even 1425, or the copy of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ from which it was taken,—is the manner in which the several books of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ are found mixed up with the other treatises of Thomas. In the description given before the notary when Ulimerius made his disposition respecting it, we have the order of the books put down as they were found in the Codex. After stating that this particular book was in octavo, and in red leather with brass clasps, one of which is broken, the account continues thus:—

*“ In hoc libello continentur ista, etc.*

*Soliloquium animæ Thomæ à Kempis, cujus prologus incipit: Consolationis gratia aliquas sententias devotas in unum conecravimus librum.*

*Item ejusdem De Imitatione Christi; qui incipit: Qui sequitur me, non ambulat in tenebris, etc.*

*Item ejusdem de interna Christi locutione ad animam fidem, quæ incipit: Audiam, quid in me loquatur Dominus Deus.*

*Item ejusdem Admonitiones ad interna trahentes, qui incipit: Regnum Dei intra vos est.*

¹ *Scutum Kempense*, p. 32.

Item ejusdem Tractatus quidam de elevatione mentis ad inquirendum summum bonum, qui incipit: *Vacate et videte.*

Item initium libelli quarti de Imitatione Christi, qui incipit: *Venite ad me omnes qui laboratis, etc.*"<sup>1</sup>

Now, from this account it will be observed that between the third and fourth books of the 'De Imitatione' we have another treatise of Thomas à Kempis, —*De Elevatione Mentis*; that at the head of the treatises enumerated there is another well-known work of Thomas à Kempis, not forming one of the four books of the 'De Imitatione'; and that the book which is the third in modern editions occupies the second place, and the second the third place; from which it is inferred that, as yet, no settled order for the books of the 'De Imitatione' had been determined, upon; and perhaps the design of putting them together as one volume had not hitherto been suggested, or had entered the mind of the author; or why is it that we find the books disconnected and mixed up with the other works of Thomas? The conclusion to which it leads the friends of Thomas then is, that this Louvanian manuscript is still more ancient than the 1441 or the 1425, for they cannot otherwise account for the manner in which the books are found; and the circumstances connected with the Codex favour the conclusion to which they come. It further intimates to us that Thomas had begun to re-edit the 'De Imitatione' before the year 1441, when he copied it out more correctly in the famous manuscript which has his name with this date attached to it. It affords additional

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Moral Cert.*, pp. 15, 16.



proof, moreover, that the opponents of Thomas à Kempis can conclude nothing against his rights from the existence of manuscripts anterior to the year 1441, as they have endeavoured to do.

Mabillon, and most of the authors who have written against Thomas à Kempis, sharing in this false hypothesis that the manuscript of 1441 is the most ancient manuscript written by the hand of our pious author, have pretended that if they had discovered a single manuscript anterior to the year 1441 they were certain that Thomas à Kempis had copied the work from others. The autograph manuscript of the 'De Imitatione' at Louvain, that Thomas had written before 1441, and the 1425, overthrow this reasoning; and far from proving that our author had copied this work from another writer, it proves, on the contrary, that in the manuscript of 1441 Thomas à Kempis has clearly indicated his own proper works, already composed or sketched out in a volume of a former date.

It is necessary still to keep this fact before us, because the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis do to this day repeat,<sup>1</sup> in spite of what has been adduced—as if they would not bear of anything against their preconceived views—that if they had discovered a manuscript anterior to 1441 the cause of Thomas à Kempis would be lost. The assertion of M. D. Mabillon had the appearance of being true in his time; it is insupportable at this day, when the question is completely changed in consequence of the discovery which has been

<sup>1</sup> M. Thomassy, *Revue Contemp.*, t. iv. p. 305; M. Ch. Vort, *Étude sur Gerson*, p. 15.



made of more ancient manuscripts which bear the name of Thomas, and have been written and copied by him.

Finally, to bring this portion of our argument to a conclusion, we may cite the manuscripts of Cæsar;<sup>1</sup> of the monastery called "in Dumo B.M.V.," near to Endhoven;<sup>2</sup> two at Augsburg;<sup>3</sup> one of Arras;<sup>4</sup> three others indicated by Sanderus;<sup>5</sup> fifteen others pointed out by Amort;<sup>6</sup> which all bear the name of Thomas à Kempis, and consequently can be brought forward in his favour were it needful.

In all, then, there are *forty-five* manuscripts, or more, recognised, which confirm the rights of our author, and among them may be counted some of *the most ancient and most correct*.

This testimony, adds Malou, deserves some attention. The reputation of Thomas à Kempis, as the author of the 'De Imitatione,' must have been very great when so many copyists have inscribed his name upon their books, at a time when this care was frequently neglected. This agreement of the copyists must then be accounted for as the effect of the tradition, which we have established in a preceding chapter, by a crowd of contemporaneous witnesses.

There is one reflection we must make about this evidence arising from manuscripts before we conclude this chapter, which is, that the two most formidable competitors of Thomas à Kempis were older than he

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 26, i.e. Kaiserburg in Germany.

<sup>2</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 136, 139.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 141.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 138-155. He points out twenty, but some of them are included in those already named.

was—one by two hundred years, it is stated,—and their several partisans ought to have been in a position to produce a greater number of manuscripts, and more ancient, and such as were more incontestable, than could have been produced for Thomas, supposing that he was not the author. But what is the state of the case? They cite sixteen manuscripts in favour of Gersen, including those where he is called *Chancellor of Paris*; and twenty in favour of Gerson.<sup>1</sup> This is not, in either case, half of the number that can be produced in favour of Thomas à Kempis: our venerable Canon-Regular, then, carries the day, even in MANUSCRIPTS, both as to *number*, and as to *antiquity*, as well as to *quality*.

*The Printed Editions of the 'De Imitatione' with the name of Thomas à Kempis.*

The first two or three known editions of the books of the 'De Imitatione' bear the name of Thomas à Kempis. The most ancient of all, that of Ginther Zainer, printed at Augsburg, was made in 1468, in folio.<sup>2</sup> It does not bear any date, but the librarians have arrived at it by the comparison of its characters or marks, and have fixed it for the year just named. It is nevertheless probable that this impression goes back to the year 1464. This edition has been made with great care, and is magnificently printed. The editor does not copy the title of his manuscript. He observes to the reader, that, properly speaking, the

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Vert, *Études*, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> M. de Grégoire calls this the "Editio Princeps," *Hist. u.* p. 253.

first book only, or even the first chapter alone, merits the name 'De Imitatione Christi.' But, said he, as the Gospel of St. Matthew has been received all entire, which is called "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, although the first chapter alone relates to this subject, so in like manner should the four books 'De Imitatione Christi,' which have received the name of the first chapter.<sup>1</sup>

If the calculations of the librarians be correct, this edition was made seven, or at least three years before the death of the author. In any case it is anterior to the year 1475, when Ginther Zainer died, as Rosweyde states.

The librarians cite an edition of the 'De Imitatione' without date, in Gothic letters, with the name of Thomas à Kempis, which they believe to be anterior to that of Zainer's, and consequently printed in the lifetime of the author.

Amort has seen another edition of Ginther Zainer, placed at the end of the *Speculum vitæ humanæ*, printed in 1471, the same year as that in which Thomas à Kempis died.<sup>2</sup>

It seems unnecessary here to enter further into the particulars of this kind of evidence; we shall there-

<sup>1</sup> Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 102, says, "I possess a magnificent copy of this edition. The volume commences thus: 'Incipit libellus consolatorius ad instructionem devotorum, cujus primum capitulum est de Imitatione Christi à contemptu damni vanitatum mundi. Et quidam totum libellum sic appellant, scilicet libellum de Imitatione Christi: sicut evangelium Mathei appellatur Liber generationis Jhesu Christi, eo quod in primo capitulo fit mentio de generatione Christi secundum carnem.' The volume terminates with this epitaph: 'Viri egregii Thome Montis sancte Agnetis in Traiecto, regularis canonici, libri de Christi Imitatione, numero quatuor finium feliciter, per Ginterum Zainer, ex Reutlingen progenitum, literis impressi ahenis.'"

<sup>2</sup> *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 135.

fore limit ourselves to the furnishing a list of the other editions of the fifteenth century which bear the name of Thomas à Kempis, giving the names of the several places where they were published, and their several dates, and refer our readers to Amort and De Grégory, from whose works the list has been drawn, for the details respecting them :—

Tubingen, <sup>1</sup> . . . . 1473	Strasburg, . . . . 1489
Augsburg, . . . . 1473	Memmingen, . . . 1489
Strasburg, . . . . 1480	Ingoldstadt, . . . 1489
Metz, . . . . . 1482	Paris, . . . . . 1493
Augsburg, . . . . 1486 <sup>2</sup>	Lüneburg, . . . . 1493
Tubingen, . . . . 1486	In Portugal, . . . 1493
Strasburg, . . . . 1487	Nuremberg, . . . . 1494
Nuremberg, . . . . 1487	Paris, . . . . . 1495
Strasburg, . . . . 1489	In Portugal, about 1500
Lyon, . . . . . 1489	Paris, Badius, . . . 1500

Here, then, we have twenty-two editions of the 'De Imitatione' printed in the fifteenth century—within a period of thirty years—which have the name of Thomas à Kempis attached to them. Within the same period of the fifteenth century not more than two editions can be counted which bear the name of Gerson. But what is more, some of the editors of Gerson have acknowledged, as it has been already stated, that the 'De Imitatione' was falsely attributed to Gerson, and that it had Thomas à Kempis for its certain author.<sup>3</sup> These editors of Gerson, then, must

<sup>1</sup> Formerly called "Augusta," where there is a University which belonged to the Duke of Wittenburg.

<sup>2</sup> This is a German translation, but it follows the edition of Tubingen.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 195. The testimony of Peter Schott, Strasburg edition, 1488. Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 109. The assertion has been made in other editions; viz., 1489, 1494, 1502, and 1514.

not only be taken as formidable witnesses against the supposition that he ever was the author of the 'De Imitatione,' but their several editions must be added to those of Thomas à Kempis as bearing most important testimony that the latter-named individual had truly composed the book.

Upon the whole, then, it appears that the editors of the 'De Imitatione' had constantly recognised the literary tradition that attributed this book to Thomas à Kempis, and that this tradition was still intact and generally acknowledged at the beginning of the sixteenth century, long before any controversy arose about the authorship. The proofs drawn from the editions, therefore, are also very conclusive in favour of Thomas à Kempis.

## CHAPTER XXV.

*Intrinsic Arguments; arising from the Sentiments  
and Expressions employed in the books of the 'De  
Imitatione.'*

WHEN the Gersenists found that they were not able to discover any historical monuments to prop up their system,—since not a vestige of any other work of Gersen, the so-called Abbot of Vercelli, could be hunted up,—they abandoned the proofs arising from so convincing a mode of testimony, and in the place thereof rushed headlong into all sorts of conjectures, hypotheses, and arbitrary comparisons; and thus they have accumulated in their works a multitude of observations, some ill-founded, others futile, and all without much weight; as if a large mass of writing, which has little real evidence in it, could make up for a few real substantial proofs, even when briefly and pointedly stated. But two good sound apples are worth a bushel of rotten ones, which are only fit to be thrown out.

As soon as the controversy, however, had taken this shape, the defenders of Thomas à Kempis were constrained to follow their opponents upon the ground



of intrinsic proofs, and to examine with care whether the principles admitted by the author, whether the events mentioned by him, whether the allusions to men and things, whether the expressions and the language used, indicate Gersen of Vercelli, a writer of the thirteenth century, or Thomas à Kempis, a writer of the fifteenth. This discussion, like all the others, has ended in a result most satisfactory for Thomas à Kempis, and most hopeless for Gersen.

Let us briefly contrast the two for a moment. On the one hand the Gersenists have considered their hero as a unique person, isolated, placed some way in the middle of centuries as an unlooked-for phenomenon ; without parents and lineage ; not belonging to any school, and never having made any disciples. Gersen, according to them, is only known by a single book—that of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’ His name, his family, his country, his very existence—all is problematical, all is contested. This writer of the thirteenth century is only revealed to us in five or six manuscripts of the fifteenth century, of which the authority is very doubtful.

On the other hand, the partisans of Thomas à Kempis follow this writer from the cradle to the grave. After having quoted a great number of witnesses, one after the other, who have known and praised him, they point the finger to the celebrated School in which he had been trained and educated, and of which he was later one of its brightest ornaments. There is Gerard the Great, as he is called (Gerard Groot) ; there is Jean Van Huesden ; there is Florentius

Radewyne—these celebrated founders of “the Brothers of the Common Life,” who have formed the mind and inspired the soul of the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’ These are they who have taught this writer all the principles of what was called the *Modern Devotion*, of which some mention or allusion is found page after page in the writings of Thomas à Kempis, and of Buschius, and all the other writers of Windesheim. The fraternal similarity which exists between the books of this school and the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ is striking and incontestable.

These pious authors speak perpetually of the duty of *imitating Jesus Christ*, of *following in His footsteps*, of *meditating on His passion*, of *seeking after solitude and silence*, of *loving the cell*, of *avoiding useless discourse and worldly talk*, of *flying from honours*, of *mortifying the flesh*, of *aiming after perfection*, of *pondering the sacred Scriptures*, of *following the example of the holy Fathers*. The book of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ is, so to speak, but the commentary, or, if you will, the development, the exposition or embodiment, of the doctrines and principles which these saintly men inculcated without ceasing to their disciples. One of the most skilful defenders of Thomas à Kempis, viz., Thomas Carré, has placed in parallel passages the chief points of doctrine which are included in the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ and those principles drawn from their school, which Thomas à Kempis has expressed in the *Lives* of his masters and spiritual advisers :<sup>1</sup> hence

<sup>1</sup> *Thomas à Kempis a seipso restitutus* ; Paris, 1651. “This volume is one of the most exact, and one of the most curious which this controversy has produced.”—MALOU.

these parallel passages lead us evidently to this conclusion—that the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ has not developed any important point of doctrine which he had not learnt, whilst still young, from the masters we have but just mentioned.

To these general remarks we shall now add some definite proofs, the evidence of which is enough to satisfy every candid mind.

I. And first we will endeavour to show by parallel quotations that the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ belonged to this celebrated school which brought forth the Congregation of “the Brothers of the Common Life,” and those numerous houses of the Canons-Regular of St. Augustine united to that of Windesheim—a school which acquired in Guelderland and the neighbouring countries an immense celebrity. By this means we shall be enabled to see also that the works of Thomas à Kempis and the ‘*De Imitatione*’ have been conceived by the same mind and flow from the same pen.

There exists, it is thought, not more than one letter of Jean Van Huesden, who was the Abbot-General of the Congregation of Windesheim in 1391, and who died in this same house in 1424, in the presence of Thomas à Kempis.<sup>1</sup> Well, this unique letter contains nearly all the ideas upon which the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ insists. Let the reader judge of them, whilst we place side by side the most striking features of the two writers. Here is what they say :—

<sup>1</sup> Buschius, *Chron. Windesh.*, t. ii. c. 21, p. 340.

*Jean Van Huesden.*

*Vita D. N. Jesu Christi* quæ nos præcessit, fons est omnium virtutum, quæ mediante ad omnes virtutes citius pervenitur, sine qua ad veras virtutes et ad suum amorem pervenire non possumus. —Buschius, *Chron. Windesh.* p. 221.

Quia exercitium et cognitio pariunt amorem ideoque necesse est, ut prius in ea exerceatur, et qui ista negligit, quamvis haberet et sciret omnem Bibliam, et Scripturam et Legem unquam positam aut conscriptam, id minime sufficeret. —*Ibid.*

Eorum inspicio multiplices et graves labores, et quam perfecte Deo obtulerunt amicos et cognatos omnes et possessiones, temporalia bona et mundi honores. —*Ibid.* p. 230.

Quid dulcius, o dilecte frater, quid securius, quid simplici columbæ salubrius, quam in petrae foramine, hoc est in Christi Jesu vulneribus delitescere et requiescere. —*Ibid.* p. 244.

Ad externa officia nullatenus, dilecte frater, aspirea, nec aliquam prælaturam affectes. —*Ibid.* p. 237.

Libenter, cum potest fieri, solus sis. —*Ibid.* p. 218.

*The author of the 'De Imitatione.'*

Qui sequitur me non ambulat in tenebris; hæc sunt verba Christi, quibus admonemur quatenus vitam ejus et mores imitemur, si velimus veraciter illuminari, et ab omni coecitate cordis liberari; summum igitur studium nostrum sit in vita Jesu Christi meditari. —*De Imit.* l. i. c. 1.

Qui autem vult plene et sapide Christi verba intelligere, oportet ut totam vitam suam illi studeat conformare. Si scires totam Bibliam exterius et omnium philosophorum dicta, quod totum tibi proderet? —*Ibid.*

Intuere sanctorum Patrum vivida exempla . . . Omnibus divitiis, dignitatibus, honoribus, amicis, et cognatis renunciabant. —*Ibid.* l. i. c. 18.

Requiesce in passione Christi, et in sacris vulneribus ejus libenter habita, si enim ad vulnera et pretiosa signata Jesu devoto contemps magnam in tribulatione consolationem senties. —*Ibid.* l. ii. c. 1.

Multo tutius est stare in subjectione quam in prælatura. —*Ibid.* l. i. c. 9.

Pete secretum tibi; ama oculos habitare tecum. —*Ibid.* l. iii. c. 53.

Nihil penitus agas sine consilio; et plus semper expertis, quam tibi ipsi credas.—Buschius, *Chron. Windesh.* p. 239.

Humilis corde sis et apparatu, et nimis multum non teneas de te ipso.—*Ibid.* p. 241.

Ama nesciri, et ab aliis contemni opta.—*Ibid.* p. 242.

Juxta hunc modum fratres devotarum congregationum, et fratres in Vindesem, se solent exorcere. *Ibid.* p. 246.

Cum sapiente et consciencioso consilium habe; et quære potius a meliore instrui, quam tuas adinventiones sequi.—*De Imit.* l. i. c. 4.

Hæc est altissima et utilissima lectio, cui ipsius vera cognitio et despectio, de se ipso nihil tenere. —*Ibid.* l. i. c. 2.

Ama nesciri et pro nihilo reputari.—*Ibid.* l. i. c. 2.

Utinam in te non dormiret profectus virtutum, qui multa sæpius vidiisti exempla devotorum. *Ibid.* l. i. c. 18.

If a little attention is given to the passages and words which have been emphasised in the above quotations, it will be seen that there are certain points of resemblance which are not the effects of chance: there is a special tone, a singular simplicity and directness of spiritual counsel peculiar to both, which show that the same views and sentiments on divine things were common to both; so that the author of the 'De Imitatione' must have been in some way intimately connected with this new and reformed school of religious thought.

II. But there is another trait of resemblance, perhaps still more striking, between the author of the 'De Imitatione' and Thomas à Kempis. The historians of the Catholic Church in Holland, in the fifteenth century, often give to certain religious persons of their time the name of "Devotee," "Devotees," and they



call the Institutions to which these persons belong "the Modern Devotion."

The religious persons who bore this name were members of the school of Gerard Groot, a man full of holy zeal, who played an important part in that country, and who became celebrated for the number and the authority of his disciples. Lindeborn, in his *Hist. Episc. Daventr.*, p. 108, mentions that a college of "the Brothers of Common Life" was transformed into a Congregation of Canons-Regular. In both one and the other condition this house belonged to "the Modern Devotion" of Gerard Groot and of Florentius Radewyns.

Buschius also, in his *Chron. Windesh.*, l. 1, c. vi. p. 25. and l. 2, c. xv. p. 316, says that "the devout father Florentius was the first Rector and Institutor of the congregation of clerks in Deventer,—the father and patron of all the *Devotees* throughout the whole country."

Now, from the writings of Thomas à Kempis, and especially in his lives of the fathers and early associates of this community of "the Brothers of the Common Life," it is clearly shown that he was from his youth upwards connected with them, and became not only a brother but a Canon-Regular of the Order of St. Augustine. He was one of those who were called "Devotees" *par excellence*, and constantly spoke their language, mode of thought, and expression of sentiment upon religious matters. And on the testimony of Eusebius Amort we may recount the words "*Devoto*," "*Devoti*," "*Devotorum*," taken in an appellative



even to four hundred and forty times in his tested works.<sup>1</sup>

Our next point in the argument for consideration is what is the habit of the author of the book of the 'Imitatione'? It is precisely that which we have defined in the writings of the "Religious" of the Congregation of Windesheim in general, and in particular in the books of Thomas à Kempis. The author of 'De Imitatione' often uses the words "Devotio" "Devoti" in an appellative sense, and speaks continually like the disciples of Gerard Groot, Jean Huesden, and Florentius Radewyns.

Here are some striking proofs of the fact :—

*Buschius writes :—*

Magister Gerardus Magister fuit et pater primus hominum *Modernus Devotus* patriæ, ad quem Deo sapientes, securum semper recursum, et post eum venerabilis, dominus *Florentius Radewyns*, primus Rector congregationis clericorum in Dordrecht, ita *devotus* pater noster, Joannes de Huesden, prior deservens eorum fidelis factus tutor, in cura consulendi, adiuvandi et defendendi.—*Chron.* A. D. 1. c. 15.

Itus frater Johannes de Dordrecht iussus est ad altiora studere, et ad sacros ordines

*The Author of the 'De Imitatione' writes :—*

Quando recordor *Devotorum* aliquorum ad Sacramentum tuum. Domino, cum maxima devotione et affectu accedentium, tunc sæpius in me ipso confundor et erubescor, quod non ita vehementer sum attractus et affectus, sicut multi *Devoti* fuerant, qui præ nimio desiderio communionis et sensibili cordis amore, a fletu se non poterant continere. . . . Licet tanto desiderio tam *specialium Devotorum* tuorum non ardeo, tamen de gratia tua illius magni inflammati desiderii desiderium habeo.—*De Imit.* lib. iv. c. 14.

Omnium *Devotorum* jubilationes, ardentes affectus, mentales excessus, et supernaturales illu-

<sup>1</sup> *Deductio Critica*, p. 219.

promoveri. . . Factus presbyter *devotus* Frater.—*Chron. Windesh.* l. ii. c. 12.

*Devotus* pater Willelmus Worneckon circa Eucharistie venerabile sacramentum valde fuit timoratus.—*Ibid.* l. ii. c. 49.

*Devotissimi* fratris Gerlaci vitam describere aggredimur, cujus interna *devotio* externis indiciis sæpius resultare videbatur. . . Addebat *devotus* Gerlaeus Petri, ideo semper nova mentis renovatione ad hæc sacramenta debere quemlibet *Devotum* sese disponere, quod, etc.—*Ibid.* l. ii. c. 55.

*Thomas à Kempis* writes :—

*Devotus* pater Florentius, dum divina mysteria celebraret, Christus cor ejus et animam spiritualis lætitiæ vino potissimum replevit.—*Vita Florent.* c. 3.

Quum igitur studii causa, in annis adolescentiæ Davontriam pervenissem, quæsi vi iter pergendi ad regulares in Windesem, ibique inventis fratribus Canonicis regularibus cum germano meo, hortatu illius inductus sum adire summæ reverentiæ virum magistrum Florentium. Adjunctus tam *devoto* viro, et *devotis* ejus fratribus, quotidie *devotam* eorum conversationem attendi; nunquam prius tales homines vidi tam *devotos*.—*Vita Joan. Gronde,* c. 1.

minationes, ac oalicas viânes, tibi offero et exhibeo.—*De Imit.* lib. iv. c. 17.

Offero tibi omnia pia desideria *Devotorum*.—*Ibid.* lib. iv. c. 9.

Potest quilibet *Devotus*, omni die ad spiritualem Christi communionem et sine prohibitionibus accedere . . . toties mystice communicat quoties Incarnationis Christi mysterium, Passionemque *devote* recolit, et in amore ejus accenditur.—*Ibid.* lib. iv. c. 10.

8

*The Author of the 'De Imitatione' writes :—*

Multi *Devoti* fuerunt, qui proximio desiderio communionis . . . a fletu se non poterant continere.—*De Imit.* lib. iv. c. 14.

Non decet me inter *Devotos* commemorari.—*Ibid.* lib. iii. c. 52.

Utinam in te non dormires profectus virtutum, qui multa sæpe vidisti exempla *Devotorum*.—*Ibid.* lib. i. c. 18.

Quando recorder *Devotos* . . . tunc in me erubescō.—*Ibid.* lib. iv. c. 14.

These latter passages are remarkable. Thomas à Kempis relates in his life of John Gronde that he was received among the "*Devotees*" of Windesheim, and that he there diligently observed the life of the "*devotee*," which inspired him with the highest admiration. And then we have the author of the '*De Imitatione*' declaring, on his side, that he lived among the *Devotees*, but that he was unworthy to live among them, because he had not sufficiently profited by the numerous examples of virtue that they had given him. Now, to what conclusion does this lead us but that the author of the '*De Imitatione*' must have lived among these religious people, so remarkable for their devotion and simple life, as it is clearly seen that Thomas à Kempis had done; and that Gersen had not, who lived two hundred years before this community of Christians was instituted; nor had Gerson, who lived the greater part of his time in the metropolis of France, and entered so hotly into the religious controversies of the day; and, that if the author of the '*De Imitatione*' was not Thomas à Kempis, he resembles him in a most truly astonishing manner!

III. But we pass on now to another point to which we draw attention. The Congregation of "the Brothers of Common Life," and that of the Canons-Regular of Windesheim, to which the monastery of Mount St. Agnes belonged, were founded in Holland, and Lower Germany. And it was from the population of these countries that they were constantly recruited. Is it certain that the author of the '*De Imitatione*' spoke the Dutch or Flemish tongue? Can any evident

traces of this be found in the 'De Imitatione'? for if so, then it is a proof against Gerson, who was French, and against Gersen, who is said to be Italian; and on the other hand, it will be a proof in favour of Thomas à Kempis, who was familiar with Dutch and Flemish. Now the reply in the affirmative will not allow of the least contradiction. Eusebius Amort, in his *Scriptum Kempense*, gives no less than three hundred and fifty instances of words and phrases, some often, others very often, repeated, of what may be termed foreign Latin or barbarisms, and such as are rarely used as pure Latin by good authors.<sup>1</sup> It is needless to weary the reader with recording them here; a few instances will suffice to prove the point, if it is kept in mind that there is abundance of this kind of evidence to bring forward for those who are curious to examine the matter further.

In the first chapter of the first book of the 'De Imitatione' we read: "*Si scires totam Bibliam exterius.*" This expression translated into Flemish, to the letter, is: "Al wist gy geheel de Schriftuer *in buiten*," which is the same as "If you knew the whole of the Scripture *outside*," that is to say, "by heart;" for "to know by heart," in Flemish, is "to know *outside*." Now Malou says upon this, "Never was there a French author as Gerson, never an Italian author as Gersen, that was able to translate in the Latin text of his book an idiom essentially Flemish! The author who has translated into Latin this untranslatable expression undoubtedly belonged to our

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 43-59.

provinces." And this learned writer continues: "I know that many manuscripts of the '*De Imitatione*' copied in Italy do not contain this word *exterius*, because the copyists have not understood it. A manuscript might be quoted where this word is replaced by the expression '*in mente*;' the copyist has translated the thought of the author, so as to avoid this barbarous term."<sup>1</sup>

"This expression, '*Scire totam Bibliam exterius*,' is truly a barbarism, unintelligible in every language which does not belong to the family of the Teutonic tongues. It is the rock against which all the efforts of the partisans of Gersen, an Italian writer, and of Gerson, a French writer, are broken. It opposes to both the Gersenists and the Gersonists an impassable barrier.

"The thing is so true that neither the Italian nor the French translators could comprehend it; the greater part have passed it without expressing it." "There is not a single translator of the book of the '*De Imitatione*,'" says Mgr. Fontanini, in his treatise *On Italian Eloquence*, "who has translated the word *exterius*."<sup>2</sup> And this is not astonishing; for the Italian cannot, any more than the French, offer any analogous expression. The translators have rendered the sense of the expression when the reasoning of the Kempists have revealed it to them; but never were they able, never could they render the word *in its etymological sense*, as it is rigorously rendered in the Teutonic languages. M. De la Mennais has rendered

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, p. 129. See *De Imit. Christi*, Ed. Gence (Paris, 1828), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Tom. ii. p. 456; Ed. Venet. 1753.



the passage thus: "*Quand vous sauriez toute la Bible.*" This is a vague version, and one in which the sense remains suspended. P. Cesari, in his Italian translation,<sup>1</sup> employs an equivocal turn, "*Si tu avessi a mente le parole di tutta la Bibbia,*" i.e. "If you have in the mind the words of all the Bible;" but these words are far from the neat and clear expression of the Flemish language, "*to know externally;*" "*scire exterius.*" This idiom, then, defies all comparison and all skill. It can only be employed by a Flemish writer. It is clear, precise, and elegant, when translated by him, to the letter. Translated to the letter in Italian or French, it has no sense."

Again, take another expression used in the 'De Imitatione.' In Book III. chap. 59, sec. 1, we read: "*Post te gemere . . . necesse est.*" A learned writer, Canon David, renders it to the letter, in his elegant translation of the 'De Imitatione,' "*Naer u te zuchten,*" etc.<sup>2</sup> The French and Italian translators, Malou says, have not been able to comprehend this expression. M. De la Mennais has translated it, "*Je ne puis, loin de vous, que soupirer et gémir,*"<sup>3</sup> i.e. "I can only, far from you, sigh and groan;" the P. Cesari, "*M'è forza di piangere, di gridare.*"<sup>4</sup> The Flemish translator has written "*after thee,*" "*post te,*" and his version is clear and precise.

<sup>1</sup> Printed at Florence in 1831.

<sup>2</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 129, 131. M. Veratti contests this matter with Mgr Malou, but the latter, in a more recent edition of his *Recherches*, replies to him, and shows that he reasons contrary to facts. See p. 152.

<sup>3</sup> *Vier boeken van de Navolging Christi* (Mechelen, 1843), p. 245.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Imitat.*, par M. Abbé F. De la Mennais (Paris, 1826), p. 348.

<sup>5</sup> *Della Imitaz.*, Cesari (Firenze, 1831), p. 265.



It is remarked that, to speak precisely, the word "naer" is equivocal in Flemish, and that it signifies in French "vers," and in Latin "ad," and more frequently "post." People often confound these two significations. The author of the 'De Imitatione' has confounded them in the passage quoted. Instead of saying, "Ad te gemere," after the real signification of the word "naer," in the phrase, he says, "*post te gemere*," in the popular signification, which is equivocal and exact; from whence it follows that the author of the 'De Imitatione' shows himself doubly Flemish in employing this expression.<sup>1</sup> Once more: when they wish to say in good Flemish that a person has regarded an event with indifference, they would say, "that he has regarded it *with an even countenance*." Well, this expression is employed to the letter by the author of the 'De Imitatione,' in the twenty-fifth chapter of the third book, sec. 3, where he says, "*Ita una æquali facie in gratiarum actione perman eas*." This is to the letter in Flemish: "Met een gelyk ingezicht." The best foreign translators have not been able to render the expression. M. De la Mennais translates it, "Regardant du même œil" (p. 223); Cesari, "Con uno stesso viso tu perseveri" (p. 179); the words "œil" and "viso" do not literally render the word "visage;" but in Flemish, it is to the letter, "with an equal visage."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 132, 133.

<sup>2</sup> Malou, *Recherches*, p. 133, who comments upon other expressions pointed out by Anort. M. Veratti gives several quotations objecting to these statements, but Malou replies, showing that they are not to the purpose, pp. 155-6. Malou replies also (pp. 157, 172) to the other objections of M. Veratti, which those may see who wish to consider the discussion still further.

Now, from these examples of Flemish idioms, discernible in the 'De Imitatione,' and which might be multiplied, as we have intimated, to a large extent, it is very clear that the author of the book must have been naturalised to the Flemish language. Malou says :—

"It is impossible for a person accustomed to the Flemish language to read the 'De Imitatione' without seeing and without feeling that the author of the book has thought in Flemish the text which he published in Latin. No reasoning can shake the intimate sentiment which is expressed in this book, or overthrow the material facts which we have pointed out. If the Gersenists and the Gersonists do not take the value of these arguments into consideration, it is because they cannot comprehend them ; as it has been very justly observed by M. Ullman, their ignorance alone can take the place of excuse ; nothing, however, can justify their incredulity ; since, in a question of which they do not know the value themselves, they ought to refer to some disinterested and competent judges."<sup>1</sup>

It is here to be observed, that this proof is of so much value, that the reader's attention should be drawn to the nature of the expressions just pointed out. Expressions have not been raised and noticed that are vague and insignificant—such as words, trivial terms, and common sayings, usually employed in many languages. They are idioms, properly so called ; expressions which belong more to the Flemish language than to any other.

"In this language," says Malou, "the words have a clear, precise, and sometimes even proverbial sense ; in every other language they have an uncertain sense, obscure, and even barbarous and unintelligible. If the Flemish manner of speech belonged also to the French and Italian languages, the skilful

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 133, 139.

writers who have translated the 'De Imitatione' would have perfectly seized the sense, and they would have rendered it without an effort, in an analogous expression. We have just seen that they have all come to grief in this translation, and that the Flemish translators alone could faithfully render it, especially in those expressions given in the book of the 'De Imitatione' which depart most sensibly from the genius of the Latin tongue."<sup>1</sup>

Now this remarkable fact forces us to believe, even in default of other proofs, that the author of the 'De Imitatione' is of neither French nor Italian origin, but that he has been born in the country where the Congregation of "the Modern Devotion" flourished, and that he spoke all his life a language which neither Gersen nor Gerson ever knew. Thomas à Kempis, however, as we have seen, was intimately connected with the members of this Congregation, brought up among them, became one of the fraternity, and has shown in his writings a perfect identity of doctrine, of language, of country, and of school with them. This proof, then, should, without question, lead us to the conclusion that Thomas à Kempis was the author of the 'De Imitatione.'

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 139, 140.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### *A Comparison of the Writings of Thomas à Kempis with the 'De Imitatione.'*

BUT we proceed to compare the 'De Imitatione' with some of the well-known works of this author, and to notice three particulars which should further most certainly convince us that none but Thomas à Kempis, one of the most notable brothers of the Community of Mount St. Agnes, one of the most celebrated writers of the Order of Canons-Regular, is the true author of the 'De Imitatione.' First, Thomas à Kempis, in his other various writings, treats upon the *same subjects* as are treated upon in the 'De Imitatione;' he treats them in the same order, and often in the same terms. Secondly, he constantly employs *peculiar forms in his manner of writing*, which have been adopted by the author of the 'De Imitatione.' And thirdly, Thomas has constantly used the same *foreign terms of speech*, the same unusual expressions, the same barbarous terms or idioms, and he has made the same solecisms as the author of the 'De Imitatione.' And the remark which Malou makes upon these points, chiefly drawn from Amort's works, is this:—"If these resemblances do not prove the

city of the author of the 'De Imitatione' and of Thomas à Kempis, I will venture to say that there are no more acceptable proofs in the domain of literary criticism."<sup>1</sup>

f.) We are able to show that Thomas à Kempis has with preference the subjects treated upon in the 'De Imitatione,' and that he treats them in much the same order of ideas. This will be seen in our present-ment for the reader's consideration, a twofold list of the subjects of the chapters selected from the 'De Imitatione,' and the titles of the chapters chosen from the reputed works of Thomas à Kempis :—

IN THE 'DE IMITATIONE.'	IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS À KEMPIS.
Lib. I. c. 16. differentia defectuum aliorum	5th Sermon to Novices. De patientia conservanda inter desideria et perversa.
Lib. III. c. 45. libili lapsu verborum.	7th Sermon to Novices. De custodia oris.
Lib. I. c. 40. cavenda superfluitate verborum.	9th Sermon to Novices. De periculo ex multiloquio.
Lib. III. c. 41. contemptu omnis temporalis gloriæ.	8th Sermon to Novices. De vana gloria cavenda.
Lib. III. c. 3. obedientia humilis subditi.	8th Sermon, 2d series. De humili obedientia servanda.
Lib. II. c. 12. gloria via sanctæ Crucis.	1st Sermon, 3d series. De cruce quotidie tollenda.
Lib. I. c. 22. consideratione humanæ miserie.	Soliloquium Animæ, c. 5. De brevitate et miseria præsentis vitæ.

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 140, 141.

IN THE 'DE IMITATIONE.'

- Lib. III. c. 49.  
De desiderio æternæ vitæ.
- Lib. III. c. 31.  
De neglectu omnia creature.
- Lib. I. c. 1.  
De contemptu omnium vanitatum mundi.
- Lib. III. c. 9.  
Quod omnia ad Deum sicut ad finem ultimum sunt referenda.
- Lib. II. c. 9.  
De carentia omnis solatii.
- Lib. III. c. 49.  
De desiderio æternæ vitæ.
- Lib. I. c. 1.  
De contemptu mundi.
- Lib. I. c. 12.  
De luctamine adversus concupiscentias.
- Lib. III. c. 3.  
Oratio ad implorandam devotionis gratiam.
- Lib. II. c. 6.  
De lætitiæ bonæ conscientie.
- Lib. III. c. 33.  
De instabilitate cordis.
- Lib. I. c. 1.  
De Imitatione Christi.
- Lib. III. c. 6.  
De probatione veri amoris.

IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS KEMPIS.

- Soliloquium Animæ*, c. 6.  
De anhelatione æternæ vitæ.
- Soliloquium Animæ*, c. 9.  
De elongatione a creaturis.
- Soliloquium Animæ*, c. 10.  
De contemptu omnium consolationum terrenarum.
- Soliloquium Animæ*, c. 12.  
De unico et summo bono querendo.
- Soliloquium Animæ*, c. 14.  
De tristitia animæ, absente Delectatione gratiæ.
- Soliloquium Animæ*, c. 19.  
De desiderio divinæ fruitionis.
- Hortulus Rosarum*, c. 2.  
De fuga sæculi.
- Hortulus Rosarum*, c. 4.  
De pugna contra propria vitia.
- Hortulus Rosarum*, c. 5.  
De devotionis gratia acquirenda.
- Hortulus Rosarum*, c. 8.  
De gaudio bonæ conscientie.
- Hortulus Rosarum*, c. 10.  
De instabilitate humani cordis.
- Hortulus Rosarum*, c. 17.  
De Imitatione sanctissimæ vite D. N. Jesu Christi.
- Vallis Liliorum*, c. 4.  
De vero amatore Dei.



IN THE 'DE IMITATIONE.'	IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS À KEMPIS.
Lib. 1. c. 2.	<i>Vallis Liliorum</i> , c. 8.
De pace acquirenda.	De pace cordis et quiete in Deo.
Lib. 1. c. 20.	<i>Vallis Liliorum</i> , c. 18.
De amore solitudinis et silentii.	De solitudine et silentio.
Lib. 1. c. 18.	<i>Vallis Liliorum</i> , c. 23.
De moribus boni religiosi.	De bonis moribus humilis monachi. <sup>1</sup>

This table evidently proves that the titles of the *Sermons to Novices*, of the *Soliloquium Animæ*, of the *Hortulus Rosarum*, and of the *Vallis Liliorum* answer nearly word for word to the titles of the chapters in the 'De Imitatione.' The 17th chapter of the *Hortulus Rosarum* is the same title, a little enlarged. It is thus clearly evident that the subjects for which Thomas à Kempis had a predilection are the subjects of predilection to the author of the 'De Imitatione.'

(2.) This resemblance, manifest in the doctrines and the thoughts, shines forth clearly also in the expressions and in the manner of writing.

The four books of the 'De Imitatione' commence with a text of Scripture: well, we can count even fifteen works or treatises of Thomas à Kempis which commence in the same manner.<sup>2</sup>

Again, the author of the 'De Imitatione' often commences his sentences by an exclamation. Thomas à Kempis has the same habit, as the following examples will show:—

<sup>1</sup> *File Amort, Deduct. Crit.*, p. 169, where many more parallel passages of this kind will be found; *Scutum Kempense*, pp. 40, 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Amort, Deduct. Crit.*, p. 163.

*The Author of the 'De Imitatione' writes:—*

Lib. i. c. 8.

O quam cito transit gloria mundi !

Lib. i. c. 3.

Quam multi pereunt per vanam  
scientiam !

Lib. i. c. 18.

Heu ! quid est vita nostra !

*Ibid.*

O quantus fervour religiosorum  
in principio ! O quanta devotio  
orationis ! . . . O tepor et  
negligentia status nostri !

Lib. i. c. 22.

O quanta fragilitas humana !

Lib. i. c. 23.

Ah, longa vita non semper emen-  
dat culpam !

Lib. i. c. 25.

O si Jesus in cor nostrum veniret,  
quam cito docti essemus !

Lib. ii. c. 12.

Eccce in cruce totum constat. <sup>1</sup>

*Thomas à Kempis writes in*

*Sermon 6.*

O quam cito transit delectatio !

*Sermon 28.*

Væ illi qui cogitat vana !

*Sermon 14.*

Heu ! miser et insipiens homo !

*Sermon 28.*

Benedicti omnes devoti !

*Sermon 22.*

O quam sanctum est in custodia  
oris stare !

O religiosæ frater !

*Sermon 3.*

Væ omnibus ambulanti-  
bus in desideriis carnis !

*Sermon 22.*

O si posses in amore Jesu pro-  
ficere. Felix qui meretur  
admonitiones Jesu.

*Sermon 20.*

O vere beata crux Christi !

O vere pretiosissimum lignum !

Amort says that he has numbered *one hundred and forty-eight* such particular expressions of exclamation and admiration in the books of the 'De Imitatione' agreeing to the like expressions in the other works of Thomas à Kempis. And some of them are peculiar,

<sup>1</sup> Vide Amort, *Deduct. Crit.*, p. 179, etc., and sec. 220, p. 233. Also *Soutum Kempense*, pp. 42, 43.

and not usually found in other authors, in like degree. Thus we have the word "Eja!" It is used in the 'De Imitatione,' in Lib. I. chap. xxiii., "Eja charissimi;" in Lib. II. chap. i., "Eja anima fidelis;" in Lib. III. chap. lvi., "Eja Fratres." Turn now to the 1st Sermon to the Novices, and we have the use of the same quaint expression: "Eja, charissimi, attendite presentiam Christi." In the 6th Sermon to the Fathers we have it again: "Eja, quantum lætabuntur." In Meditation 10 on the Nativity, it occurs thus: "Eja, domine Jesu!" In 'the Soliloquy,' chap. xxiv., "Eja, Obsecro te, Domina mea."

"O si" and "O quam" are also very frequently used as expressive of great earnestness; and found equally in the works of Thomas à Kempis and the books of the 'De Imitatione.'

This use of unusual terms may be regarded as one of those peculiarities by which one writer is distinguished from another, and by which we may, to a great extent, identify whether a certain book has been written by any particular author or no. This applies to Thomas à Kempis as the author of the 'De Imitatione.' It does not apply at all to the writings of Gerson; and we know not that Gerson wrote anything.

This resemblance then is striking; but it becomes more apparent still, when we compare the general form of the phrases of the 'De Imitatione' with that of the work of Thomas à Kempis. The 'De Imitatione' is only really composed of a series of pious thoughts expressed for the general part in the form of aspirations, of warning, of meditation, and of prayer. Each

verse includes a complete doctrine, which has not always a manifest connection with that which precedes or that which follows it. The very title which is sometimes given to the book of the 'De Imitatione' confirms this observation, "*Liber sententiarum de Imitatione Christi*," or rather, "*Admonitiones ad Spiritualia trahentes*." One sees then only a collection of counsels and of axioms without any sensible connection. Well, this style is the style of Thomas à Kempis. This writer scarcely ever develops his subject; never does he abandon himself to a surprise; he heaps up maxims; he accumulates sentences; he forms an agglomeration of pious thoughts; he never sets himself to bind his ideas so as to present them in one continuous chain whereof all the links hold together. The default of plan or concatenation is quite as perceptible in the *Garden of Roses* and the *Valley of Lilies* as in the 'De Imitatione.' One is forced then to recognise the same pen here again, guided by the same mind.

(3.) We have already drawn attention to the Flemish or barbarous Latin expressions in the 'De Imitatione,' and given two or three examples, to prove that the writer must have been accustomed to talk and think in the Flemish tongue. They are unusual and peculiar, and when we can show that they are employed in the undisputed works of Thomas à Kempis as well as in the 'De Imitatione,' we contend that we have established another intrinsic proof in favour of Thomas à Kempis being the author of this last-named work. The number of these makes it impossible to suppose that it is a fortuitous coincidence.

but give a selection, still the list will be read :—

IMITATIONS.

IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS À  
KEMPIS.

-Quid prodest tibi itate disputare. . .	<i>Atta</i> , for things sublime, is to be found forty times.
in Bibliam exterius.	<i>Scire exterius</i> is found once.
Si multa satis bene to tamen quia sunt quæ nescis.	<i>Satis</i> , for the superlative, is found fifty-two times. <i>Quia</i> , for <i>quod</i> , habitually.
ibil tenere . . . .	<i>Tenere</i> , for <i>astimare</i> , is met with forty-two times.
ntia est.	
modicum videt.	<i>Modicum</i> , for <i>parum</i> , thirty-nine times.
Ideo leviter indig-	<i>Leviter</i> , for <i>faciliter</i> , is found eighteen times.
Valde magnum est	<i>Valde</i> , for the superlative, one hundred and twenty-three times.
a stare, sub præ-	<i>Stare</i> , for <i>perseverare</i> , seventy- four times.
-Nunc pro magno quis primi fervoris et retinere.	<i>Pro magno</i> : this expression is found six times.
-Bonum est quod labeamus aliquas contrarietates.	<i>Gravitas</i> , for <i>difficultas</i> , is found twenty-nine times.
-Qui non radicem eum tentationes	<i>Redient</i> , for <i>redibunt</i> , very often.
—Ultra proprium libenter ducitur.	The infinite, taken substantively, forty-four times.
5.—Quidquid ex ar, totum efficitur	<i>Totum</i> , for <i>omne</i> , thirty times.
•Oportet et discas frangere, si vis t	<i>Frangere</i> is found thirty-three times. <i>Tenere</i> , for <i>servare</i> , twelve times.

## IN THE 'DE IMITATIONE.'

IN THE WORKS OF THOMAS A  
KEMPIS.

Lib. I. c. 21.—Non attrahas tibi  
res aliorum.

*Attrahere sibi*, for *case solliciti*  
twice.

*Ibid.*—Si inferni poenas cordia-  
liter perpenderes.

*Cordialiter*, eleven times.

Lib. I. c. 23.—Dabit magnam  
confidentiam supportatio adver-  
sitatis.

*Supportatio*, once.

Lib. I. c. 25.—Grosse vestiuntur.

*Grossus*, six times.

Lib. II. c. 1.—Disce exteriora  
contemnere et ad interiora te  
dare.

*Exteriora* and *interiora*,  
hundred and twenty-one times.

Lib. II. c. 10.—Pone te ad patien-  
tiam.

*Ponere se*, fourteen times.

Lib. III. c. 7.—Forte serva pro-  
positum.

*Propositum*, for *professio religio-*  
*fifty-six* times.

Lib. III. c. 57.—Nunc dimite  
transire.

*Dimittere*, for *sincere*, very  
frequently.

Lib. III. c. 58.—Illi bene et  
optime contentantur, si homines  
scirent contentari.

*Contentari*, as a verb *passive*  
twelve times.

Lib. IV. c. 1.—Verba tua mihi  
gratanter sunt accipienda.

*Gratanter*, seventeen times.

Lib. IV. c. 3.—Ad pauperculam  
dignaris venire animam.

*Pauperculus* is met with four  
times.

Lib. IV. c. 10.—Cuncta phantas-  
mata in caput ejus sunt re-  
torquenda.

*Phantasmata* is found nine times.

Lib. I. c. 24.—Tunc magis con-  
solaberis super devota oratione,  
quam super delicata comes-  
tione. Tunc potius gaudebis  
de servato silentio, quam de  
longa fabulatione.

*Devota* is used four hundred  
forty times in the several  
of Thomas a Kempis.  
*Fabulatione*, twenty times.



A list a dozen times as long again of such unusual words, or unusual modes of using them, is given by Eusebius Amort in his *Scutum Kempense*.<sup>1</sup> We must now leave the reader to judge whether an Italian writer of the thirteenth century has been found in accordance so remarkable with a Dutch writer of the fifteenth, without there having been between them any connection of fraternity, order, or school? We seriously ask of impartial critics whether a Dutch writer of the fifteenth century has been able to divest his mind of his own peculiar ideas, and of his own proper language, so as to servilely imitate an Italian writer of the thirteenth century, an unknown writer, a writer who is the reputed author of but one single book? Such a phenomenon, says Malou, is not to be found in the history of letters, and it wants all the courage of the Gersenists to stay on such a plank for safety.<sup>2</sup> Now, how do the Gersenists try to evade this argument, so fatal to their cause? M. de Grégory confesses that the works of Thomas à Kempis are full of maxims drawn from the 'De Imitatione';<sup>3</sup> but he explains this resemblance by a very simple fact. Thomas à Kempis, he says, has meditated on the 'De Imitatione,' he has even learnt it by heart. Thomas being posterior to Gersen was able to appropriate the thoughts of the religious Benedictine, and to give also to his writings a Gersenist colouring.<sup>4</sup> This is the way the Gersenists try to evade the arguments against them, however clear and convincing they may be.

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 43-59.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. du liv. de l'Imit.*, t. i. p. 223.

<sup>3</sup> *Recherches*, p. 148.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* t. i. p. 227.

This response of M. de Grégory would have a very specious aspect if the works of Thomas à Kempis contained actual textual quotations of the book of the 'De Imitatione,' and if the style of this latter work differed essentially from the other works of Thomas à Kempis. In this case the borrowing,—if they will the plagiarism—would be easy to discover. But it must be seen that Thomas à Kempis has not quoted the 'De Imitatione' to the letter, that he has not made extracts, that he has not borrowed anything from it. But he employs certain terms, he follows the ideas. The resemblance is especially striking in the style, the manner of speaking, and in the manner of thinking. It is, in a word, in the turn of mind which is proper to an author; it is in the qualities of the soul of which a writer cannot divest himself, and of which another author cannot take possession, that the unity or the fraternity of these books is distinguished. This fraternity is not in appearance only in some way on the surface of the writings; it manifests itself even in the depth of thought, and in all the harmony of the composition. This resemblance is so exact, that if any one wished to rest upon the hypothesis of the Gersenists, he must admit without hesitation that Thomas à Kempis has made the book of the 'De Imitatione' his sole book,—that he has studied it from his infancy even to his latter days,—that he is so penetrated with it from the period of his novitiate, that during the rest of his life he limits himself to make paraphrases, but never to be said fairly to make a quotation from this one book which he so studied.

a follower of the Gersenists must go still further, these doctrines, and this manner of writing are more ancient, as they say, than Thomas à Kempis; we must say, that Gerard the Great, Van Huesden, and Laurentius have formed themselves into a school on the sentiments of this single book, which was even unknown and unheard of up to their time, and that they suddenly, without any known cause, made it the source of their teaching and the *résumé* of all their doctrines.

But may we not, says Malou, from the very response of M. de Grégory to our arguments, draw forth still further corroboration of their soundness? M. Grégory admits that Thomas à Kempis was able to appropriate the thoughts of the 'De Imitatione,' so as to give his writings a colouring of the 'De Imitatione.' There is not here an admission that Thomas à Kempis only knew the 'De Imitatione' very well, but that Thomas à Kempis's other works are very like the 'De Imitatione,'—so much so, that if he did not write it, he must have been at great pains to learn the style? But then comes the question, How is it that he never exactly quotes or refers to the 'De Imitatione,' which he knew so well, and admired so much as to imitate its style and its sentiments? If he were not the author of it we might have expected, under the circumstances, that he would often, or at least sometimes, have cited passages from it, or commended it in some way, in one or other of his books. But it was not because he was the author of the 'De Imitatione' that he does not make any complete or clear extract

from it, or in any degree draw his readers' attention to it in any of his other numerous works ; for whenever do we find an author, unless he be very conceited, speaking highly of his own work, however much it may be esteemed by the public? or when do we find him citing his own words in support of what he writes, unless there be some special cause necessitating such a reference?

That the other works of Thomas à Kempis, then, are so very like to the 'De Imitatione,' that one of the most powerful and talented of his opponents declares that he must have appropriated the thoughts of this book, to write in such a similar manner to it, and yet, while thus knowing and admiring it so much, he never in any of his other writings commends it, or makes a direct quotation from it,—is, when fairly considered, so convincing an argument, that it can lead us to only one conclusion : that Thomas à Kempis was indeed the author of the 'De Imitatione.' Every one must feel that Thomas à Kempis, penetrated with the doctrines of his masters and religious counsellors, has explained them very happily and accurately in his divers works, but more especially in the four books which now form the 'De Imitatione Christi.' This conclusion flows spontaneously from the facts we have endeavoured to set forth in this chapter, and it evidently confirms all the more direct proofs which we have advanced in the preceding chapters.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 148-150.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *Remaining Objections answered, with a brief Review of the Controversy.*

IN drawing to a conclusion this defence of the claims of Thomas à Kempis, we must notice a few remaining objections and difficulties which have been brought forward by his opponents, and then review the position to which the evidences, and the arguments founded thereon, have brought the matter in asserting his title to the authorship. As the defenders of Gersen have had such a small amount of evidence to rest their cause upon—no contemporary witnesses—no dated manuscripts before the time of Thomas à Kempis—no editions of the 'De Imitatione' till long after his death—no intrinsic arguments that afford any solid ground to rest any claim upon—they have been at much more pains to obscure, or, if possible, to annihilate, the decisive proofs which have been advanced on behalf of Thomas à Kempis. We must therefore follow them to some extent; and, while omitting many trivial or useless points, endeavour to disperse any seeming doubts which they still urge against his claims.

And first, as to the testimonies brought forward in opposition to his title to the authorship.

At the very outset, we may state this important fact, that the Gersenists and the Gersonists have only discovered a single writer who has in any way thrown the slightest doubt upon the rights of Thomas à Kempis before the commencement of the controversy in the seventeenth century; and this writer is John Trithème, who, on one occasion, attributed the '*De Imitatione*' to John à Kempis, the elder brother of Thomas, who was a 'religious' like him, and Prior for some time in the convent of Mount St. Agnes. It is concluded from his testimony that, although well versed in the history of his times, and nearly contemporaneous with Thomas à Kempis, he ignored the tradition respecting Thomas which we have alleged, and that consequently this tradition is suspicious. This writer has asserted moreover, it is stated, that "the old men of his Order related, in his time, that the most ancient religious" had read the '*De Imitatione*.' The opponents of Thomas assume from this that, according to Trithème, the '*De Imitatione*' must have existed before the fifteenth century, at a time when it seems unlikely that Thomas à Kempis could have composed it.

Thus the statements of Trithème are made to appear more unfavourable to the cause of Thomas à Kempis than they really are. But in whatever degree they are adverse, they do not lend any support to the Gersenists, since it is presumed that the title which we claim for Thomas à Kempis belongs to John à



Kempis, who lived more than two hundred years after the time when it is said that Gersen flourished. It fixes also the date of the publication of a book to the first years of the fifteenth century, which the Gersens claim to be written in the thirteenth century, so that they really damage their cause by bringing forward this objection. Let us go further, let us supply what they have overlooked or attempted to keep back. Erithème, in his book *De Scriptoribus Ecclesiasticis*, published in the year 1495, attributes the 'De Imitatione' to Thomas à Kempis. So also does he make special mention of his being the author of this book in his *De Viris Illustribus Germaniæ*, where he says:—

"Thomas de Kempis Ordinis Canoniorum Regularium S. Augustini Montis S. Agnetis prope Swollis in Diocesi Trajectensi, vir in divinis Scripturis eruditus et studiosus, vita et conversatione devotus, scripsit quedam devota volumina, de quibus feruntur subjecta, *De contemptu Mundi, et Imitatione Christi*, l. 4. Sermones ad Novitios, etc. Claruit temporibus imperii Bavari Imperatoris anno 1410. Et notandum, quod duo hujus nominis feruntur fuisse, ambo de Kempis, ambo Regneres in Monte S. Agnetis, ambo ingenio præstantes, et ambo varia eudentes opuscula, quorum primus tempore Gerardi Magni in Religionem conversus divinis relationibus dignus habitus erat: supra diximus opuscula scripsisse dicitur."<sup>1</sup>

This passage has been adduced to show that some uncertainty existed upon the question. But surely this scarcely amounts to the shadow of a doubt against the rights of Thomas à Kempis. We may admit that the elder brother might be accounted worthy to have written the 'De Imitatione,' for he was indeed held in high esteem by all, and had a higher position in the

<sup>1</sup> Vide Amort, *Scutum Kempense*, p. 36.

monastery of St. Agnes than Thomas, but this does not amount to an affirmation, or even an intimation that John à Kempis wrote the book ; it is not designed, we conceive, to bring in question the right of Thomas to be the author, which he had just before so positively asserted, in what he then wrote, as he had done in a previous work. Indeed, upon the whole, we regard the statements of Trithème as a testimony in favour of Thomas à Kempis, and of no little value. And if in his *Histoire des hommes illustres de l'Ordre de St. Benoît*, he throws a doubt upon the opinion he had emitted, and appears to imagine that John à Kempis had composed this book, he confesses nevertheless that the general opinion is against him. His second opinion then rested simply upon a conjecture, from which there was the opposition of his own confession, and the tradition received about it, and the testimony that he himself had rendered to this tradition in his Catalogue of the Writers of the Church. A conjecture then, evidently proposed with some hesitation, and an isolated opinion, how can it prevail over the positive testimony of eye-witnesses, that we have cited as contemporaneous with Thomas à Kempis ?

The seniors of the Order of St. Benedict relate to Trithème that their seniors had read the 'De Imitatione' for many years. We grant it ; but it is in vain that the Gersenists quote this fact against Thomas à Kempis. Trithème published his Catalogue of Ecclesiastical Writers in 1495 ; that is, eighty years after the 'De Imitatione' had been composed. Since the year 1414, when, according to what has been said, this

book was written, even to the time of Trithème, three generations had passed. One may then say with truth that the seniors of the seniors had read this good book for many years, and yet bring it well within the period assigned to Thomas à Kempis. How then can they from this expression of Trithème draw the inference that it had been written before the time fixed upon for Thomas, or before the year 1414? The thing is absurd. Such an argument shows the weakness and the hollowness of the opposition made to the claim in behalf of Thomas à Kempis.

M. de Grégory, moreover, opposes to Thomas à Kempis the opinion of three great writers of the company of Jesus, the Fathers Possevine, Bellarmine, and Sirmond.

Let us consider the weight of this objection.

P. Possevine had commenced—as he himself said, when he spoke of the works of Gerson—by embracing the *common opinion*, which attributed the ‘*De Imitatione*’ to Thomas à Kempis. He was arrested in this opinion, which he held with so much confidence, because his brethren glorified themselves in possessing in Belgium the autograph of the author. “Nevertheless,” said he, “we must add here the information we have received from P. Rossignoli, who long and well examined this question.” He then relates the discovery of the manuscript of Arona, attributed, as it has been already stated, to Abbot Gersen or Gessen, and he supposes, wrongly, with P. Rossignoli, that this manuscript had belonged all the time to the ancient house of the Benedictines at Arona. But he does not

conclude anything upon the matter ; he leaves the question in suspense.

It is not true then that Possevino has contested the rights of Thomas à Kempis ; he has limited himself to recalling the opinion of P. Rossignoli without following it. The lines we have just quoted were printed in 1606, eleven years before P. Rosweyde published his celebrated *Vindiciæ Kempenses*, that is, at an epoch when the contest had just commenced, and when the question was neither discussed nor cleared up. It is of moment to notice these points, as P. Rosweyde shows clearly how the manuscript got to Arona, and that it was at a subsequent period to the time when Thomas à Kempis is said to have written the 'De Imitatione.' For had Possevino known these things, he would doubtless have written otherwise. For, notice further the conclusion of Bellarmine, who, after the example of Possevino, had out of politeness to P. Rossignoli accepted the new opinion favourable to Gersen ; he had no sooner examined the question by the light of the *Vindiciæ Kempenses*, than, changing his opinion, he recognised and proclaimed the rights of Thomas à Kempis. "That the books of the 'De Imitatione,' " said he, "had been composed and written by Thomas à Kempis is a fact which P. Heribert Rosweyde, Soc. Jesu., clearly demonstrates in the *Vindiciæ Kempenses*, in the face of adverse conjectures. The reasons that he brings satisfy me completely, and I embrace his opinion without reserve."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Scriptos et compositos esse ab eodem Thoma libros *De Imitatione Christi* superscriptos, contrariis conjecturis eversis, demonstrat evidenter, in *Vindiciis Kempensibus*, P. Heribertus Rosweydeus, Soc. Jea., cujus inibi rationes plenas

Now such a statement as this, coming from one of their own witnesses—who having declared for Gersen, is nevertheless convinced, upon further evidence and careful examination, that he has been in error, and who in opposition to his former opinion asserts that the books of the 'De Imitatione' are undoubtedly written by Thomas à Kempis,—should, if anything would, convince the Gersenists of the futility of opposing the claims of Thomas à Kempis. But no, they still continue to urge old as well as fresh objections, which it will be in vain to follow.

As to P. Sirmond, he has never discussed the question. He has only pronounced upon the age of a single manuscript, which the learned have judged to be much more recent than he has himself judged it. That is all.<sup>1</sup>

But there is another view to take of the statements of these notable men which the Gersenists oppose to Thomas, which would lessen their weight, if it had not been fatally reduced already, and that is, that when these great writers, and others besides, would emit an opinion contrary to the rights of Thomas à Kempis, they are not in a position to raise a weapon against our author. The rights we defend are not matters of opinion but of fact. From the moment the controversy is raised, the writers who take part in it are no longer judges, but pleaders; their opinions are worth just so much as the reasons upon which they are based, and

*sine satisfecerunt, et sententiam penitus amplector.*"—Bellarm., *De Script. Eccles.*, Colon. 1621, cited by P. Strozz in the Preface of his translation of Malou's *Recherches*, p. xlv.

<sup>1</sup> Vule Amort, *Deduct Crit.*, p. 82.



in more. It is ridiculous to oppose to Thomas à Kempis as any authority, the opinion of writers who have taken part for Gerson. The only authority which they can here reasonably invoke are those of the Contemporary authors of Thomas à Kempis, or other champions: and they cannot invoke them but as witnesses of fact in litigation. Modern authors are not able to serve as witnesses in a question of fact which took place in the fifteenth century. Well then, as we have just seen, the ancient authors render homage to the rights of Thomas à Kempis, and all,—with the exception of Trithème, who only slightly hesitates for a while, and might well be brought forward in his favour also,—salute him as the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’ It is in vain then that the opponents of Thomas à Kempis have tried to quote contrary witnesses to the rights of our author. The proofs advanced in his favour, in the agreement of Contemporary Witnesses, remain with us, as definitely and irrevocably acquired.

We feel called upon to reply to such objections and difficulties as apparently carry weight with them, and which might, if allowed to pass unnoticed, prejudice the minds of some persons against the rights of Thomas à Kempis; and we have endeavoured to do this to the best of our ability, but we come upon a number of objections of such a trivial nature, that it would be best to pass them over in silence, as it would be a waste of time and a trial of patience to attempt to answer them; and a little consideration on the part of those who meet with them will soon satisfy them



that they are of little value, and cannot weigh for one moment against the positive and decisive proofs which have been already advanced in behalf of Thomas à Kempis. There are, however, a few remaining objections of a *general* character that should be briefly noticed and answered before we conclude this investigation. One is this—and the adversaries of Thomas never tire of repeating it over and over again—that he is but a “mediocre” author; that he shows neither elevation nor profoundness of thought; that his uncontested works are infinitely inferior to the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’ Now this is one of those general accusations which, containing some portion of truth, is designed to destroy the credit of Thomas, and it is more difficult to reply to on account of its vagueness, and what it implies, than to a direct charge, because it requires us to sift the composition of the allegation, and separate the portion of truth which it contains from its false implication. Grant that Thomas was a “mediocre” writer, grant that his other works do not equal the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ how is this a proof that he did not write the latter, as the charge would insinuate? Let us take this last point first. Do we not constantly find that great authors have written one book or work that is pre-eminently popular over all the others which they have written, while it is considered that their other works do not equal that which is reckoned as their masterpiece? Bunyan wrote many other books besides the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, but none of them are to be compared to it; but who would argue that on this account there could be any

question or doubt about his writing that most popular book by which his name has been made famous? Milton is chiefly known for his *Paradise Lost*; Augustine, for his *City of God*; Homer, for his *Iliad*; Virgil, for his *Æneid*. But it would be a very unsound and unreasonable argument to say that because many of their other known works are inferior, therefore we may well doubt whether they wrote the most famous of all their works. On the other hand, does not the fact that some of the most famous of authors owe their celebrity to one great work written by them, which is superior and sometimes vastly superior to many, if not all, of their other works, lead us to infer that Thomas à Kempis wrote a work which may justly be considered superior to the rest of his writings, and that this work was the 'De Imitatione'?

We do not then deny the fact—it is indeed allowed all along—that the other works of Thomas à Kempis are inferior to the book of the 'De Imitatione.' The thing is evident, and what is more, the author of it was without doubt convinced of it himself, since he copied the book of the 'De Imitatione' at the head of his other works in 1441. He there treats it as his masterpiece. It was in grouping together these books that he was the most successful in unfolding and in enforcing the doctrines and precepts of his masters and of the Confraternity of "the Brothers of Common Life," to which he belonged. Moreover, the principles which he here set forth in a concentrated form are found scattered in his other works. The 'De Imitatione' was, according to the very exact expression of

M. Bohringer, the *culminating point of all his treatises*. "The other books of Thomas à Kempis," said this writer, "are inferior in merit and beauty, nevertheless we find a multitude of parallels and of harmonies, that may be called material, the stones of construction which have been employed to build the grand edifice of the '*De Imitatione*.' We must mark well," continues he, "the circle of the ideas of 'the Brothers of the Common Life,' the spiritual sphere in which Thomas à Kempis moved, and this form of language, full of wisdom, that he employs in the biographies of the chiefs of the Congregation, and which he attributes to them. We find everywhere the same spirit: Thomas à Kempis, in the main, has only drawn from the profundity of this common spirit. This spirit has found in him its most eloquent organ; no one, unless he be a writer included in this sphere, could have written the book of the '*De Imitatione*.'"<sup>1</sup>

A few words more must also be said about Thomas à Kempis being a "mediocre" writer. We do not profess to look for that depth of learning, that profoundness of thought, that concatenation of reasoning, those transports of eloquence, which are often met with in the writings of the Fathers. The '*De Imitatione*' is not loved and admired for such excellencies; it has other merits of its own: the author's language is brief, his thoughts concise, his doctrines have an experimental pointedness in them, his counsels come forth warm and fresh and vigorous, as direct from the heart, in all their simplicity, earnestness, and zeal for the

<sup>1</sup> *Die Kirche Christi*, etc., pp. 700, 705.

welfare of the souls he is desirous of benefiting. This causes his words to find a wonderful response in the soul, unequalled as it is rare : there is a stillness and a quiet beauty, a holy solemnity and spiritual life in them, that takes hold of the heart, and very often moves it to yearn and seek after a nearer life with God. And this peculiarity is more or less discernible in all the other writings of Thomas à Kempis.

"I have perused anew," says Malou, "some of his other works which had formerly charmed me, and I discerned in their features truly sublime. His greatest merit, I insist upon remarking, does not consist in his explaining mysteries with profoundness, nor in proposing magnificent theories, but in describing with a marvellous art the movements of the Christian soul, and in analysing the vicissitudes of the human heart. It is especially as a moralist, as a spiritual doctor, as an intimate counsellor, as a physician of souls that he is admirable."<sup>1</sup>

When one goes over the works of Thomas à Kempis one often receives impressions, says the same writer, which the reading of the book of the '*De Imitatione*' produces. In all his writings, it is the skilful moralist, the master of high spirituality, the consoler of the life, who makes himself felt, and who shines forth. The matter is there a little less rich, and the discourse a little less cultivated than in the '*De Imitatione*,' but it has the same basis, the same spirit, the same thought, the same turn of phrase, in one word, it is the same author.

M. Pierre Couston, the venerable Vicar-General of the diocese of Montpellier, who translated the Sermons of Thomas à Kempis into French, speaking of the oneness of tone and form in his writings, says :—

<sup>1</sup> *Recherches*, pp. 211, 212.

I have read and re-read often, and with delight, the works of Thomas à Kempis. What a man! how different from other men! Among many other works, he has left us many discourses, addressed by him to the religious novices which he was the master. What eloquence! It flows with a limpidity which contrasts singularly with the eloquence of our day, eloquence wholly human, over which we often groaned. It is absolutely the admirable and nearly perfect book of the 'De Imitatione Christi,' (and by parenthesis) not conceive how any one can have a doubt about the value of this book, the most beautiful of all, when they have read the works of Thomas à Kempis."<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, we have this most general and vague of all objections used by the adversaries of Thomas à Kempis. It is a parting shot at their opponents, when confident of their own defeat. "You contend," say they, "that the rights of Thomas à Kempis are clear: if they were so, would they have been contested for centuries? Does not the duration of the controversy obscure the validity of his claims, and make his ownership of the 'De Imitatione' doubtful?"

Certainly not, says Malou; the duration of the controversy proves nothing against the rights of Thomas à Kempis, but only against the logic of those who attack them, the want of discernment, the lack of firmness in those who continue the dispute, even when they have no longer any reasonable ground for doing so. When they dispute without regard to the rules of logic and criticism, without taking count of facts proved, they may dispute to the end of time upon a point which is clear in the whole world. There are those who try to show off their learning and cleverness by

<sup>1</sup> Courton, *Sermons de Thomas à Kempis*; Arignon, 1854.



contesting matters and facts about which there need not be the shadow of a doubt. We might as well contend that there never was such a person as Julius Cæsar or Napoleon Bonaparte; and to show the absurdity of those who continue to contest what is everywhere allowed to be true, and to throw doubts upon well-proved facts, one of the leading logicians of the last generation undertook to prove by a process of reasoning that no such person as Napoleon Bonaparte existed; leaving us to see how futile it is to attempt to argue with a certain class of sceptics beyond a certain point; and that having done all to clear away every possible or alleged hindrance to their reception of the truth, you can only leave them to themselves, being confident of this, that you carry with you the convictions of all candid and upright minds.

Why has the controversy relative to the authorship of the '*De Imitatione*' lasted so long? Why is it not yet terminated? Is it because the rights of Thomas à Kempis are obscure? Is it because they have not been clearly proved for more than two centuries and a half? No one has a right to say so. The demonstration afforded by P. Rosweyde appeared so convincing to the Cardinal Bellarmine, who certainly was not little-minded, or incapable of forming a sound judgment upon such a matter, that after having read it, he declared, in 1621, that the question was settled, notwithstanding the many contrary conjectures.<sup>1</sup> This demonstration has since received great development; the whole of Christendom also—with the exception

<sup>1</sup> Bellarm. *De Scrip. Eccles.* ; Colon. 1621.



of some few scholars who have severally supported the rights of Gersen and Gerson—is convinced that Thomas à Kempis is the true author of the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’

Nevertheless the controversy continues; and why? Because, instead of consulting, before all, the facts in a question of facts, instead of listening to witnesses who relate what they have seen and heard, they obstinately decide the question by the aid of manuscripts *without* date, by the aid of hazardous conjectures, arbitrary hypotheses, ingenious accounts, and by the aid of all those sallies of wit, and unsupported or irrelevant opinions, which are as smoke and vapour in the presence of facts.

If they continue in this way—and if the defenders of Thomas à Kempis, who have historical data and positive evidence to support them, think fit to reply to them—there is nothing to prevent the quarrel continuing to the end of the world. But if such a spectacle be witnessed, if the contest be again renewed, and witnessed by those who come after us, it will be none the less true that the rights of Thomas à Kempis have been fully proved for more than two centuries and a half, and that, notwithstanding the latest objections, even up to this present time he rests in possession of the title as the author of the book of the ‘*De Imitatione Christi*.’

In conclusion; to be morally convinced of this, let us take but a brief review of the whole controversy respecting the authorship of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’

It has been shown that Thomas à Kempis was

originally in possession of the title—it was the traditional belief that he was the author; nor was this matter ever disputed for upwards of a century and a half after the books of the 'De Imitatione' were written. It is true that during this period manuscripts and editions of the 'De Imitatione' appeared attributing the work to Gerson and Gersen; but the names of other individuals also were attached to certain copies, as the names of St. Bernard, of Ubertinus, of Canabaco, and others; from which it is evident that these names were adopted in ignorance of the real author, and were but the conjectures of the copyists or editors of the book, in those parts of the country where they had no knowledge of the matter, and therefore little dependence can be placed upon these inscriptions, when alone, without other certain evidence. But Thomas à Kempis, it has been seen, was acknowledged, by various writers, as the author long before the controversy began, and long before any other individual was distinctly put forward as such. It has been shown how the possession of the title by Thomas à Kempis was first disputed by Dom Cajétan; and that thirsting for the glory of his Order he called an individual into existence about whom no one knew anything, and asserting him to be a Benedict, proclaimed him to be the author of the 'De Imitatione.' The ambitious design of this Benedictine enthusiast was the origin of the long-continued dispute about the authorship. After a time, defenders of the rights of Thomas à Kempis appeared, and proved how utterly erroneous the conjectures and suppositions of Cajétan.

are, and that they could not be allowed to have any voice, whilst trustworthy testimony was to be brought forward for Thomas. Cajétan and certain members of the Order had, however, committed themselves to this new hypothesis, and they would not withdraw from the false position they had taken lest the honour of their Order should be tarnished; and therefore they fought by every possible means to make out a case for their imaginary author. In vain their errors and the weakness of their arguments and the want of any substantial proofs were exposed; they were deaf to every voice but their own, and could see no proof but that which their own fancied imagination had conjured up. In vain disinterested men, and those most skilled in critical study, proved to them that the rights of Thomas à Kempis were well substantiated, and could not be overthrown. Holding to the false position they had taken, with a resolution worthy of a better object, they not only tried to bolster up their cause by various devices, but laboured by all possible means to undermine the validity of that of Thomas à Kempis. Since the controversy was prolonged and became more secure. Another individual was in the meantime prominently brought forward as one more likely to be the author than Gersen, whose name was almost, if not altogether, like to his, and for which it was thought he might be mistaken, and who, being a well-known and celebrated writer, was in his stead conjectured to have written the book. Thus men's minds became confused, and it was only by entering thoroughly into the matters of dispute, and balancing the evidence, that it

was possible to show how insupportable were the claims of other individuals when put into competition with those of Thomas à Kempis.

The three elements of discussion which it was necessary to consider were — 1st, Historical proofs, or the testimony of contemporaneous witnesses, upon whose word or statement reliance could be placed; 2dly, The evidence from the inscription of manuscripts and editions in the fifteenth century; and 3dly, Intrinsic proofs—that is, how far the composition, sentiments, and expressions of the book accorded with what was known of the character, life, or writings of the author. And what is the result when we come to balance the evidence between the three principal competitors for the authorship?

First, in favour of Thomas à Kempis *sixteen Contemporaneous Witnesses or more* can be produced. In favour of Gersen there is *not one* that can be produced. And in favour of Gerson *not one* that can be substantiated.

Secondly, in favour of Thomas à Kempis there are at least *forty-five manuscripts* that can be brought forward; among which are found *the most ancient with name and date*; that is to say, two of the year 1425, one of 1427, and another written by the hand of Thomas in 1441. The first of these was written *fifty-six years before* the death of Thomas à Kempis. For Gersen, only *sixteen* manuscripts are produced, which comprise those where he is called *Chancellor of Paris*; and the most ancient of them with date is said to be that of the year 1441, though this is disputed, as

ly shown, but taking this date, it is about *two hundred years AFTER the probable death of Gerson*. For on *twenty* manuscripts are cited, of which only one is dated, one of the year 1441, which is doubtful, the other of 1463, written consequently *twelve and thirty-two years AFTER* the death of Gerson. Counting up the manuscripts for Gerson which bear the name of Gerson there are *thirty-six*, whilst for Thomas à Kempis *forty-five* can be enumerated.

As to the editions, here also Thomas à Kempis has the advantage. Not only are the earlier ones in his favour, but even some of the editors of Gerson's works acknowledge Thomas as the author of the '*De Imitatione*.'

Thirdly, as to intrinsic proofs : we see that the life, age, country, and character of Thomas à Kempis all as fall in with the sentiments and expressions of the '*De Imitatione*' in a remarkable degree,—that the writings of Thomas in several points coincide with the book, and indicate him to be the author,—whereas little can be said in favour of Gerson on these points, as so little is known of him, if even they can prove his existence, which we have seen to be very doubtful. And as to Gerson, neither his life, character, country, nor circumstances are such as to favour the idea of his being the author ; nor from what is known of his writings can they be said to correspond with the style of the '*De Imitatione*.'

We contend then, from this brief review of the controversy, and a due consideration of the facts also founded upon facts, that it is reasonable

and logical to conclude that the rights of Thomas à Kempis to be the author of the 'De Imitatione' have been fully established, and that the partisans of Gersen and of Gerson have not been able to substantiate the claims of either one or the other of these individuals whose cause they have severally espoused.

And further, having thus fairly established the claims of Thomas à Kempis by positive demonstration, we would secure the position gained for him, by asking. In what possible way can his opponents ever deprive him again of his rights to be the author? They must first be able to refute the proofs which have been substantiated in his favour; and especially are they obliged to controvert, and in some way overthrow, the testimony of the sixteen Witnesses which has been advanced on his behalf—not by arbitrarily challenging their testimony without any reason or sufficient ground, but by proving either that no such testimony has been given in support of Thomas à Kempis, or that it is not worthy of credit. This, it has been seen, they have tried to do in several instances, but without success; so that thus far they have not been able in any sensible degree to shake the position he has gained. And from the great search there has been made for manuscripts and other evidence—as the statements of writers previous to the beginning of the controversy—to invalidate the claims of Thomas, and the length of time in which they have been engaged in doing this, and all to little purpose, there seems small likelihood that anything will in future be produced or brought to light that can materially affect the rights of Thomas



Kempis, and the apparently impregnable position which this controversy has at last yielded to him.

There may be those who will yet remain unconvinced, and continue in doubt about the authorship. Sensible and disinterested men will, however, examine the question with impartiality and candour, and in their hands the verdict is left; for we are fully persuaded that after having carefully weighed the reasons and facts which bear upon one side and the other, they will be ready to confess that the long disputed question has been settled in favour of Thomas à Kempis; and hence we conceive that we arrive at a satisfactory solution of the proposition with which we started, and that it can be confidently affirmed upon good grounds—upon well-authenticated evidence, which has been laid before the reader,—that Thomas à Kempis is undoubtedly the author of the book entitled the '*De imitatione Christi*.'

## PART IV.

### CRITICISMS.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### *Passages needing some Qualification.*

IN the earlier portion of this work, whilst speaking of the excellencies of the 'De Imitatione,' allusion was made to a few passages that could not be viewed with an entire approval, or which should be received with some qualification; and an intimation was given that some notices would be taken of them, as well as of certain sweeping criticisms which had been made upon the book; and to the first of these we shall now revert.

(1.) *First*, there are a few sentences in which the author of the 'De Imitatione' appears to advocate the hermit's life and an entire withdrawal from the world. Thus, for instance, he says:—

"Avoid the acquaintance of men."—*Imit.* l. 8.

"Whoso therefore withdraweth himself from his acquaintance and friends, God with His holy angels will draw near to him."—l. 20.

"Love to live alone with thyself; desire the conversation of none."—lll. 53.

"Thou oughtest to sequester thyself from thy acquaintance and friends, and keep thy mind void of all temporal comfort."—*Ibid.*

Now we readily allow that retreats from the world for short periods, when possible, or even shorter seasons of retirement for sacred exercises, are very desirable, and contribute much to the welfare of the soul, if they are not even essential to our final perseverance: for at such times we are enabled solemnly and faithfully to review our lives and past conduct, make confession of our sins more thoroughly to God, seek for a renewal of grace, and go forth again to our duties in life, and mix with our fellow-men, strengthened with fresh resolves not to be turned aside from the way of life by the cares or vanities of the world, but to live more than ever to God and to His glory. Such withdrawals from the world are very beneficial, and to be encouraged. And if this were all that the passages imply, we should not need to question the advice given. But if more than this is meant—if the words are to urge us to a complete retirement from the world, to a bidding good-bye to all friends and acquaintances, a giving up of our calling in life to live solely a solitary life with God, apart from the company of men, then we take exception to them. This course of life may be esteemed a monastic excellency, and be considered by some as a sign of a higher life, and a means of attaining to it. But where is it commended in Scripture, unless we distort certain passages to this view? And how can it be regarded as a higher, nobler, or more Christian life, than to take our stand with others, and fight the battle of life bravely in that allotted sphere where the providence of God may have placed us, and where we may be the means of doing

some little good, in however humble a situation, or however secluded a corner of the world we may find ourselves? "A man is not crowned except he strive lawfully," we are told in Holy Scripture. He must take his part within the lists, and wrestle with his adversaries fairly and openly; there must be no shrinking from the race, no hesitation in giving the full vigour of our energies to gain the goal. We must follow the great Captain of our Salvation wherever He may lead us; we must put on the whole armour of God, that we may resist the wiles of the devil, and endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Such is the tenor of the language everywhere inculcated by the Word of God; but to leave our home-ties and relative duties, to give up the work and the place to which God has evidently called us, under the plea of having more time for God, and to serve Him more entirely, is frequently but a delusion—a following our own will and way, rather than God's will and way, though we may do it under the design to attain to greater holiness of life. To shut ourselves up within stone walls, to regard it as a very fault to converse with our fellow-men, seems to be an intrenching ourselves within unlawful defences—betokens a want of manly, courageous trust in the grace and protection of God to defend and support us when engaged in our warfare with the world; it appears too much like a running away from fear of the fight, a cowardly shrinking from encountering the foes God would have us to overcome and subdue.

God has not designed man to dwell alone. In

doing so he is apt to deteriorate for want of exercising certain faculties of his soul. Some of the highest virtues of the Christian life are called into active service and developed by contact with his fellow-creatures ; and in many ways will he find the opportunity of following the blessed footsteps of Christ's most holy life by taking his part in the business of life, which opportunity he would otherwise miss. If he withdraw himself entirely from the society of men, how can he exercise gentleness or Christian courtesy, which so softens and cheers the intercourse of life ? How learn to bear the burdens of others and lighten the sad evils of life to which we are all alike subject ? How exercise the virtue of patience with the froward, contemptuous, and malignant, whom we are sure to meet with in the world ? How can he practise forbearance towards those who provoke him—bearing to give offence or injury to others in ways to which he may be tempted ? How can he exercise that most divine virtue—forgiveness, towards those who may do him wrong in anywise ? How can he go about doing good like his beneficent Saviour, performing many acts of kindness—helping the fallen or distressed, instructing the ignorant or foolish, sympathising with the sorrowful and the sufferer, encouraging and strengthening with loving counsel the anxious, weak, or timid souls he will everywhere find or come alongside in the journey of life ? See we not what grand opportunities of perfecting himself in many Christian virtues he would lack, and in how many ways he would come short of facilities for the imitation of Christ ! Not

only does the world around him suffer from his withdrawal and his ceasing to take part in life, as a good soldier of Christ, but he does not glorify God as he might do, when his light does not shine before men; and what is more, he himself suffers, often becoming morbid, self-righteous, and morose, remaining immature, stunted, wanting growth in grace, and that fuller development of the whole man whereby we attain to the stature of a more perfect life in Christ.

For these reasons it is, then, that such passages as we have pointed out should be taken with some qualification. We doubt whether the author designed them to be taken in the extreme sense in which they appear, but rather as a guard or counteraction against a worldly life, where God is never sought alone, and man shrinks even to commune with his own soul; for in many places, as we shall see, he teaches us how to live as Christians in company with others. But whether he meant the words to be viewed in this light or not, this entire separation from the world does not seem in accordance with the will of God. Though it may be thought by some to be choosing a shorter and safer way to heaven, it is very questionable; it does not seem the way to gain the prize, or the way rightly to engage in the race; it has not the example of our Saviour's life, nor that of His Apostles, or the early Christians to commend it; neither do they encourage the followers of Christ to adopt it, but rather the contrary. The longest retirement we read of in our blessed Saviour's life was that of forty days, and that was on an especial occasion before entering upon the



of His ministry ; for before this, whilst unknown to the world, He lived among men, being first subject to his parents in the home at Nazareth, and then, as a young man, talking with them and helping them.

But to whom are the Epistles of the New Testament written but to those engaged in the busy occupations of the world, and fulfilling its relative duties, as parents and children, masters and servants, citizens and neighbours? None are written to those who shut themselves up from the world. They are not named. It is therefore to be esteemed a safer way and a healthier life, and one whereby a man may make greater advances in godliness, if in the one case, as well as in the other, he resolutely determines to live to the glory of God and to seek after the welfare of his own soul. I cannot therefore fully agree with the 'De Imitatione' in the passages we have pointed out, but would rather follow the direction of the saintly Keble, when, in that beautiful morning hymn, he teaches us how we may best serve God :—

" We need not bid, for cloistered cell,  
Our neighbour and our work farewell,  
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high  
For sinful man beneath the sky :

The trivial round, the common task,  
Would furnish all we ought to ask,  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God."

We are not all constituted alike ; some persons are more disposed than others to a contemplative life. Others are more disposed to a busy active life ; but as it is not good for

those who throw themselves heartily into whatsoever their hands find to do in the way of duty to neglect seeking moments for quiet thought with themselves and for communion with God, so neither is it well for those given to a contemplative life to become oblivious to sublunary things, and neglect to seek intercourse with their fellow-creatures. In either case we shall find it to our advantage and growth in spiritual perfection, not to become wholly absorbed in the one kind of life to the exclusion of the other, but to combine the one we are most given to follow with the other in some perceptible degree. Some persons, by the providence of God, moreover, are called to a comparatively secluded and retired life, and yet it is good for such even to take an interest in those about them, however few or lowly they may be, and to seek out occasions of usefulness; their hours of loneliness will be made all the sweeter thereby, and their souls ready for and quickened to greater devotion.

And here let it be remarked that though we do not advocate the solitary or purely monastic life, yet are there conditions in which many who are like-minded might live together with great advantage, deriving mutual help, society, and convenience, and where opportunity would be afforded them for the exercise of those Christian graces which we have already named. There are those of both sexes, in large towns and populous places, whose circumstances leave them, as it were, alone in the world, without friends near them; and there are others who, having no duties in the

family circle, might be spared : these would generally find it a good and blessed thing to live together under rule and discipline. Great would be the benefit of the interchange of views and sentiments ; of fellowship, sympathy, godly counsel, and encouragement which they would receive one from another. Whilst not living solely to themselves, and caring only for their own souls, what strength and new life would they gather in, from thus associating together to labour for Christ, and how constantly incited to engage in many works of piety and charity by the atmosphere of devotion and holy love which they breathed in the society of their spiritual home ! This sweet union of souls would greatly serve to keep alive within them the flame of fervent devotion, and animate them continually with fresh ardour to run the heavenly race. It is a matter of wonder that there are not many such communities—both brotherhoods and sisterhoods—carried on in simplicity and economy, under some approved clergymen, and such as have some business qualifications for managing such institutions. It may be the dread of the evils associated with the Romish monasteries in times past that has blinded us to the advantages of persons dwelling together in Christian communities, upon proper principles. Thomas à Kempis himself was associated with such-like societies, and much interested in them, preferring them to the too often vitiated state of existing monasteries. The Moravians have adopted the practice largely. Moreover, let us keep in mind what the Psalmist says, as applicable to such a condition :—" Behold how good

and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity !”

(2.) Another passage wherein we cannot altogether agree with the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ is when he would have us pray for sorrow or chastisement.<sup>1</sup> We conceive that the counsel he gives arises from a misapprehension and misapplication of the words of Scripture. The words to which we allude are these :—

“Say, with the prophet, ‘Feed me, O Lord, with the bread of tears, and give me plenteousness of tears to drink.’” (Ps. lxxx. 5.)—*Imit.* i. 21.

Take it with the context, and you will find that it was an acknowledgment that sin had caused this chastisement to fall upon God’s people :—“O Lord God of Hosts,” the previous verse says, “how long wilt Thou be angry with Thy people that prayeth ? Thou feedest them,” etc. This is very different from praying for this judgment of God to come upon us. It is a deprecation rather—a prayer that it may be averted. We need chastisement, we know, for our sins, and let us bear with faith and patience whatever God may lay upon us ; but can it be right to pray for, to call down, God’s judgment, even upon ourselves ? we know not whether we can bear it, or whether it will be good for us ; and should we not pray rather, as our Lord has taught us, in that pattern of all prayers, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” ? Good is

<sup>1</sup> Still we should not be doing justice to the author on this point also if we did not add that in another place he takes wholly a different view of the troubles and miseries of life, and prays to be delivered from them, and from such cares as he conceives might hinder his progress in grace. The passage we allude to is as follows :—“I beseech Thee, my most gracious God, preserve me from the cares of this life, lest I should be too much entangled thereby.”

it also to live under discipline,—to keep our bodies under, to deny them even in things lawful, to sorrow, ay, even deeply, for our sins, and to chasten ourselves for what we do wrong ; but this is very different from asking God to send chastisement or sorrow, which it is better to leave with Him, to do what He thinks is best for us, and if it should come, to pray for grace to bear it aright, and that it may turn to our profit. It seems to be a characteristic of certain ascetics in religious devotion to regard it as a mark of eminent saintship to court and ask for pain and suffering. Thus St. Theresa constantly used the words,—“Suffer or die.” St. Catherine of Sienna prayed—“I desire, Lord, to live here always conformed unto Thy passion, and to find pain and suffering my repose and delight.” St. Philip Neri prayed—“*Increase my pains, but increase my patience.*” Doubtless these persons aimed high, and in some sense had passages of Scripture to support their views. But such examples are indeed questionable, not only for the ordinary Christian, but for those that strive much to excel in grace. Though Christ was “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” we never find Him doing anything as man to increase that sorrow or grief ; though He endured much suffering, even to the bitter death of the Cross, we never find Him voluntarily inflicting pain or suffering upon Himself, or even desiring it ; on the contrary, in that hour

and from the many necessities of the body, lest I should be caught by pleasure ; and from whatsoever is an obstacle to the soul, lest, broken with troubles, I should be overthrown. I say not from those things that worldly vanity so greatly desireth ; but from those miseries that as punishments, and as the common curse of mortality, do weigh down and hinder the soul of thy servant that it cannot enter into freedom of spirit as often as it would.”—*Imit.* III. 26.



of all bitter hours, when He passed through His mysterious Agony in Gethsemane, He prayed to be delivered from the awful misery He had to pass through, and yet submitted His own natural will and desire, so to speak, in prompt and willing subjection to the will of God His Father. His words and conduct on this occasion must be ours all through life ; and instead of longing for pain or sorrow, to rejoice in God's many mercies with a thankful spirit, and praise him day by day for His goodness with a joyful heart. And should bitter sorrow or racking pain come upon us in God's Providence, then to fall back upon our blessed Lord's example, and say with Him : " Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me ; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done ;" and if the cross be continued, to seek as quickly as we can a cheerful submission to God's will, and more constant supplies of grace to support us under the trial. Other arguments might be advanced, but this example of Christ should suffice.

Another passage of doubtful import, which will come under the same category as the above passage from the ' *De Imitatione*,' is this, where Christ is represented as saying to the Christian soul—

" I am He who instructeth men to despise earthly things, to loathe (*fastidire*) things present."—*Imit.* III. 43.

It is true that, in the words that follow, the devout soul is instructed thus—" To seek things heavenly, to relish things eternal." And here the question presents itself in this form, To do this, that is, to relish heavenly things, is it necessary, or is it desirable, or in



accordance with God's will, that we should loathe things present? This is a point that needs very delicate handling to gain a clear view of what God requires of us. First, earthly things and things present are apt to rise up as a mountain between us and God; they frequently absorb our attention and draw off our hearts from God and heavenly things; our faith in Him, and in the land that is far off, becomes dim through our pursuit of and attachment to the things of this world. We have need, then, to be constantly on our guard, and to watch against this fatal propensity, and boldly and promptly to take the most stringent measures against being drawn within the circle of that enchanting whirlpool, which hurries us on to destruction, and if needs be to cut off the right hand, or to pluck out the right eye. Continually is it necessary therefore to "mortify our members which are upon the earth," that we fall not into this state of alienation; for they that are Christ's, we are told, have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof. Now all this is to be done that our flesh, being in subjection to the spirit, we may ever obey the godly motions of the Divine will in righteousness and true holiness. Keeping this in mind, then, we come back to the question, "Is it necessary, or desirable, or in accordance with God's will, that we should learn to loathe things present?" We answer, after careful consideration, that it is not. If it were necessary in order to gain heaven that we should learn to turn away with disgust from all that we love and like—that we should try to loathe the enjoyments which come in

our path—to loathe everything that makes life pleasant to us, then we must even do so: rather than lose heaven, and be left to perish eternally, men would crawl upon their knees to church every day of their lives, they would day by day scourge their bodies till the blood ran out from them. But who hath required this at our hands? Not God! He is full of goodness and mercy, and delighteth not in the sufferings of His creatures. He would make them happy both here and in eternity; and when He does afflict and punish the children of men, it is still for their profit, and that they might be partakers of His holiness. To loathe the good things God sends is, as it were, to insult Him,—to teach men thus to live is to bring religion into disfavour, and to cause them to turn away from God as a hard and cruel Being. Surely this is the very reverse of God's will! Nor would He have Himself thus to be regarded by His creatures. Are we not continually taught to praise God for His goodness even in temporal things? And if we do not taste of them, but reject them, how can our hearts and mouths be truly filled with grateful accents? The Spirit speaketh expressly, saith St. Paul, of “some in these latter times, that shall depart from the faith . . . forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good,” continues the apostle, “and to be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim. iv. 1, 3, 4, 5). Let us then follow the counsel he

gives us in another place: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). Let us bear in mind also how the first primitive Christians "did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God," and we shall not go far wrong.

Moreover, by thus "loathing things present," men full of great devotion often unfit themselves for the duties of life and for doing God good service; their usefulness to others is hindered, and they are apt to give a false view of how God would have all men to live. Thomas à Kempis mentions an instance of one of the brotherhood to which he belonged, who in the great fervour of his devotion lost all desire for food, and for days would not come among his brethren; his superior was obliged to interfere, and bid him change his course of living, but his health had been so affected, that he became weakly and sickly and died not many months after; thus cutting short a life which, properly ordered, might have been pre-eminently serviceable to God's glory on earth. The evil of this sort of asceticism was early seen among the "Brothers of Common Life," and the zeal of its members in this respect was greatly altered. We cannot, therefore, but feel justified in taking exception to the passage we have named.

(3.) There are other passages of doubtful meaning, which we hesitate to accept, since they inculcate a severance of all earthly love, in order, as it is implied, to rise to a higher love of God, and, as a consequence, of our growth in grace.

Thus, for instance, the 'De Imitatione' says—

"A soul that loveth God despiseth all things that be inferior unto God."—*Imit.* II. 5.

"Thou oughtest to be so dead to such affections of beloved friends, that (inasmuch as appertaineth unto thee) thou shouldest wish to be without all company of men."—*Imit.* III. 42.

Christ too is represented as speaking thus :—

"If thou desire to mount to this height, thou must . . . pluck up and destroy both that hidden inordinate inclination to self, and all love of private and earthly good."—*Imit.* III. 53.

And again—

"He that desireth to walk freely with Me ; it is necessary that . . . he do not cleave to any creature with special love."—*Imit.* III. 53.

We cannot see that this withdrawal or deadening of our natural affections is needful, or to be approved of, even in the most saintly. All carnal and inordinate affections are to be cast off, however dear to us they may be ; nor are we to suffer anything to stand between us and our God and Saviour. He it is who must ever have the chief place in our hearts, and must be supremely loved above all else, so that nothing be put in competition with him, or be permitted to withdraw our hearts from Him. But to be "without natural affection" is a mark of the reprobate and not of the saint (Rom. i. 31) ; and surely we may love those near and dear to us on earth, and enjoy the society of those among whom God has placed us, and especially that of Christian friends—the faithful and devout. We allow there is a danger and temptation even in the companionship of those who are lovely and

of good report, and that we need grace and spiritual wisdom even in our enjoyment of earthly friendships, which we should receive as God's gifts, lest we lose sight of the Giver, or suffer our hearts to become less loyal and devoted to Him, whilst we delight ourselves in the gifts He bestows upon us. But ever mindful to give God the chief place in our affections, is it incompatible with the highest devotion to God to love, even with deep affection, those whom God has given us? This we feel to be a momentous question, touching the very springs of purest happiness, and we answer it solemnly and thoughtfully, that we do not think the one love, even faithfully and ardently exercised, is inconsistent with the other kind of true love. There are, we admit, some passages of Holy Scripture which seem to imply that the one is incompatible with the other. Such are the words of our Saviour when He says, "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (St. Luke xiv. 26). And again, "Who-soever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (St. Luke xiv. 33). And it may be said that we do not sufficiently comprehend or understand the higher life of a devout soul, or we should admit that as some attain to greater degrees of holiness than others in this life, so it is the highest attainment of the divine life on earth to sever our affections wholly from all things and persons on earth that we may love God solely and entirely. We confess that we do not like to argue against any view



or counsel that may seem to give God that highest glory a creature on earth can give—to be so absorbed in Him as to see and think of and love none but God. Some very few may have attained to this height, but it seems not to be a state belonging to man in his present condition, and can alone be truly attained in another world.

Moreover, what becomes of that other law of Christ, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," spoken at the same time when He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and strength"? This at once decides us upon determining that it is not at variance with the highest devotion to God to exercise a deep attachment and a loving regard for those near and dear to us, because we have not only our blessed Saviour's permission thus to love our earthly friends, but His command to do so; and we contend that the carrying out of His precept in this respect most thoroughly—viz., to love our neighbours as ourselves, whilst at the same time we love God with all our heart—is unquestionably the highest form of devotion to God, and that the one is not incompatible with the other. A man may love his wife most affectionately, but it is not inconsistent with this love for him to love his children also most dearly; and there is no need that the one clash with the other, or the one lessen the other, for it is often rather the other way; the one kind of love is made conducive to the other, and fosters and intensifies it. And so it is, we hold, that the love of our earthly friends, when purely exercised, is in keeping with



intense love and devotion to God ; that the one need not hinder or obscure the other, but should rather tend to strengthen and exalt it. The passage alluded to as uttered by our Saviour, about hating our nearest relations, which seems to sanction, if not to insist upon, a severance from earthly ties, is to be taken as a Hebraism, and as expressing what our Saviour elsewhere says on the point : " He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me " (Matt. x. 37), i.e. ' He that suffers any earthly tie to stand in the way of loving Me, or that draws him away from Me, or that is preferred before Me, is not worthy of Me.'

But we advance a point further : we contend that the cutting asunder of all earthly friendships, and estranging our heart from those God has given us, under the plea of loving God more entirely, is wrong — is a contravention of God's laws — and consequently what He does not ask from us. He would that our love to Him should lead us to love our friends more truly and dearly ; and He would that our love to those we are drawn towards should teach us and lead us to love Him again with a truer and better love than before. Nay, does not St. John go so far as to say that the neglect of earthly love is a sign of the destruction and quenching of the divine love within us ? for he says, " He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death " (1 John iii. 14). And again, " Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother " (1 John iii. 10). And in the following chapter he says, " If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ; for *he that loveth not*

ing brother whom he loveth most, how can he love God whom he loveth not most? And this commandment have we from him. That he that loveth God love his brother also." (1 John iv. 20, 21). Hence abound those passages urging us to love our fellow-creatures around us: such as, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (1 John iv. 7, 8, 11). And another apostle saith, "Seeing that ye have purified your souls, in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Peter i. 22). It would almost be impossible to find stronger words than these we have quoted, urging us to the cultivation of real love towards each other, and condemning those who, out of an idea of excelling in love to God, alienate their affections from all kith and kin.

Even that particular or private love, which the 'De Imitatione' in two or three passages seems as if it would quench within the soul, is pre-eminently commended and encouraged in Scripture; thus, for instance, "Husbands, love your wives, *even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it.*" "So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies: he that loveth his wife loveth himself;" and again, "Let every one of you in particular so love his wife *even as himself*" (Eph. v. 25, 28, 33). Moreover, does not our Saviour set us an example in this respect, in His

bestowing special love upon some particularly more than upon others? Did He not tenderly love His mother, and even to the last, amid His sufferings on the cross, care for her? Are we not told that "Jesus *loved* Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"? Did not these sisters send a message to Him concerning their brother, "Lord, behold, he whom *Thou lovest* is sick"? and as He wept at the grave, did not the Jews say, "Behold *how he loved him*"? (St. John xi. 3, 5, 36.) And further, did not our Lord choose out a few humble men to be His companions; and, gathering them together for the last time, does not St. John say of Him, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end"? (John xiii. 1.) And from among these, was there not one whom Jesus specially loved, and who is called by way of distinction, "*the disciple whom Jesus loved*"? (John xiii. 23, xix. 26, xx. 2, xxi. 7, 20.)

And who can ever read St. Paul's Epistles without being struck with the many kind messages and words of love which he sends at the close of most of his Epistles to particular persons; and how desirous he is to cherish and keep up this love in their hearts! Surely the apostle was sincere in what he said; and it is very interesting to examine his several salutations to those he knew and had contracted a friendship with, and to notice how he is cheered by their love and remembrance of him, and how he returns their love and the remembrance of them, in words of touching tenderness. Take but one instance: writing to Philemon he says, "For we have great joy and con-

solation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother:" and again he says, "For love's sake, I beseech thee" (Phil. 7, 9).

Sufficient has been said to show the grounds on which we presume to differ from the sentiments or views expressed in the '*De Imitatione*' placed at the head of this paragraph. We think they savour of an asceticism that is not scriptural; of a transcendentalism which is not according to the will of God, though the attaining of the pure love of God be its aim. We therefore take exception to the passages, and consider them hyper-religious and inculcating an imaginary excellence, or a stretching after a perfection which is not wholly agreeable to the mind of Christ and which is dangerous to the soul's welfare, if not injurious to that love of God to which it aspires. We would therefore rather advocate the opposite course, and instead of loosing the cords of kindred life and earthly love, draw them closer in the bonds of holy fellowship and devotion to God. We would rather bid men—instead of being cold and heartless, and withdrawing their affections as much as possible from their fellow-men—to endeavour to promote peace and goodwill towards men; and to cultivate a kindliness of feeling, a tender affection, a hearty helpfulness and loving intimacy, as far as in them lies. And we believe that if rightly viewed and rightly exercised, this love which we bear to earthly friends may be made stepping-stones to bring us and them nearer God, and into greater conformity to the likeness of our Blessed Saviour. Hence we advocate the cherishing and

fostering of those endearing ties of domestic love that gladden our homes, as gifts from a good and loving God, for which we must thank Him more and more, as the Author of them, the more we rejoice in them. Hence, in our endeavour to love God more, and with this purpose in view, we should heartily encourage and promote the interchange of social amities and the sweet intercourse of devout and social spirits in such wise as it will draw them closer together in holy companionship, and afford them wonderful refreshment as they travel along life's common road in cheerful godliness.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *On some omitted Passages.*

IN many of the English editions of the 'De Imitatione' there are a few passages which have been left out, and which seem to call for some notice. Doubtless they have been omitted as unsuitable for the use of members of the English Church, or as likely to give offence to the minds of some. There are certainly two or three passages that are objectionable, and not, as it is thought, consonant with the teaching of Holy Scripture; there are, however, others that have been omitted in which there does not appear to be real harm or error, and might be worth retaining in any future editions of the work.

(1.) Here is a passage of great beauty and worth, which is rendered into English. This first part is printed in the English editions:—

"A priest clad in his sacred vestments is Christ's viceroy, that he may beseech God with great supplication and humility for himself and for all the people."

But this portion of the paragraph is not printed:—

"He has behind him and before him the sign of the Lord's cross, that he may always remember the passion of Christ. He bears the cross before him in his chasuble, that he may dili-



gently behold the footsteps of Christ, and fervently study to follow Him. The sign of the cross is marked on his back, that he may bear with clemency, for God's sake, whatsoever adversity he may have to endure from others. He wears the cross before, that he may bewail his own sins; and behind him, that out of compassion he may lament the sins of others, and know that he is constituted, as it were, a mediator between God and the sinner."<sup>1</sup>

And then it goes on as in our English editions:—

"Neither ought he to cease from prayer and from holy oblation till he prevail to obtain grace and mercy"—*Imit.* iv. 5.

But why should the passage be left out? Is it because the cross is prominently brought before us? We reply, that though the use of the crucifix is nowhere sanctioned in the Church of England, the use of the cross is. It is used in baptism on the forehead of every member of the Church; it is permitted on our churches, and *in* our churches. The use of the chasuble with the cross largely marked is esteemed by some to be legal.<sup>2</sup> We do not purpose entering into

<sup>1</sup> "Habet ante se et retro dominica crucis signum; ad memorandam jugiter Christi passionem. Ante se crucem in casula portat; ut Christi vestigia diligenter inspiciat et sequi ferventer student. Post se cruce signatus est, ut adversa qualibet ab aliis allata elementer pro Deo toleret. Ante se crucem gerit, ut propria peccata lugeat, post se, ut aliorum etiam commissa per compassionem defleat, et se medium inter Deum et peccatorem constitutum esse sciat."

<sup>2</sup> Dean Hook, remarking upon this outer dress as formerly worn by the priest in the service of the altar, says: "In the time of the primitive Church the Roman toga was becoming disused, and the penula taking its place. The penula formed a perfect circle, with an aperture to admit the head in the centre, while it fell down so as completely to envelop the person of the wearer. A short penula was more common, and a longer one for the higher orders; it was this last which was used by the priests in the services. Worldly fashions change, but the Church '*semper eadem*' retained, and yet retains, this dress. The Romish Church has altered it much by cutting it away laterally, so as to expose the arms, and leave only a straight piece before and behind. The Greek Church retains it in its primitive shape; the old brasses in England also show the same form, some even since the Reformation."—*Church Dict.*, 1846.

any controversy with those who object to its use: sufficient that it is considered lawful: and being so, is it not wise and salutary to note its meaning—to have brought before our minds the purpose or object of this sign when it is worn by the priest who celebrates at the altar, to see and know that it is no mere ornament or unmeaning mark, but that it is designed to help us to keep present in our hearts the great atonement which Christ made upon the cross for our sins; and that as we in heart and soul desire to partake of His salvation in coming to receive the Holy Sacrament, we may be assured that, as the priest bears the mark of the cross on his *back*, so Christ in very truth did bear our sins in His own body on the tree; and that, as the priest bears the cross in *front* also, so Christ, by pleading that cross before the throne of God, will be enabled to present us also faultless unto His heavenly Father?

It is well for those *who minister* to have always before them a lively consciousness of the solemn and mysterious nature of the Holy Sacrament they celebrate, which the sacred vesture they are clad with is calculated to awaken. And it is well for those *who are ministered to*, and who are about to receive the Blessed Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, to have impressed upon them, even through their outward senses, a deep and pervading perception of the reality and efficacy of that great propitiation which Christ made, once for all, upon the cross for us.

Or is the passage omitted because the priest is spoken of as a "mediator"? Yet may we not all

plead and pray one for another? And if "the prayers of a righteous man," as we are told, "availeth much," should not the celebrant at this highest and most solemn of all services be possessed with the devout feeling that he is engaged to mediate or intercede for all those that come to partake of that Holy Feast? And so all those who are present should feel that they are individually included in the number of those whom the priest prays for, as directed by the service of the Church, "that by the merits and death of Christ, and through faith in His Blood, we, and all Thy whole Church, may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His Passion." And then continues, as an act of solemn oblation:—"And here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Thee; humbly beseeching Thee, that all we, who are partakers of this Holy Communion, may be fulfilled with Thy Grace and Heavenly Benediction." The passage does not then, it is conceived, contravene the spirit or letter of the teaching of the Church of England, but vividly arouses us to enter into the full purpose of her highest service, with the most devout feelings and intentions. Hence the words would be well worth retaining.

(2.) Another passage, which has been omitted, probably because it speaks in such laudatory terms of those who formerly lived in monasteries, and notes their fervour and devotion as an incitement to stir us up to greater zeal, and which, being translated, is as follows:—

"After what manner do so many 'religious' live who are strictly subject to the discipline of the cloister? They rarely go abroad; they live in much seclusion; their diet is very poor, their garments are coarse; they labour much; they speak little, they watch long; they rise betimes; they spend much time in prayer; they frequently read; and resolutely keep themselves under all kinds of discipline. Behold the Carthusians, the Cistercians, and the monks and nuns of divers orders, &c. every night they rise to sing psalms to the Lord. It would therefore be shameful that thou shouldest be sluggish at such a holy season, when such a multitude of religious people begin with joy to give praise to God." *1—Imit.* l. 25.

Now what is objected to here? It argues but an ignorance of past history, or the blind prejudice of a bigoted zeal, not to acknowledge the great and valuable services performed by those living in monasteries in times past. Learning, and art, and science, and civilisation are much indebted to them. They transcribed manuscripts when no printing was used, and thus perpetuated and spread abroad the wisdom of past ages. They built splendid houses and cathedrals to the glory of God and His service. They reclaimed waste places of the earth, educated the young, fed and clothed the poor and needy, and prepared many for the sacred ministry. In a dark and brutal age, when the earth was full of cruel habitations, they sheltered the oppressed; and the weak and tender-hearted found among them a peaceful resting-place.

<sup>1</sup> "Quomodo faciunt tam multi alii religiosi, qui satis artati sunt ad disciplinam elanstrari? Raro exeunt, abstracte vivunt, pauperumque conditioni grosse vestiuntur, multum laborant, parum loquuntur, diu vigilant, nunc surgant, orationes prolongant, frequenter legunt; et se in omni disciplina continent. Attende Carthusienses, Cistercienses et diverse religionis monachos ac moniales; qualiter omni nocte ad psallendum Domino assurgunt. Et ideo turpe esset ut tu deberes in tam sancto opere pigrescere; cum tanta multitudo religiosorum incipit Deo jubilare."

whilst even the high and mighty ones of the land, who had themselves taken part in the turbulent proceedings of their times, would sometimes—seeing the vanity of earthly things—seek a refuge in these homes of piety, and strive to make their peace with God by a true repentance of their past sins, by faith in Christ, and an amendment of their lives. The “religious” in these places kept alive the worship and knowledge of God and His revealed will, and carried on a service to Him with a severity and a devotion that puts to shame the coldness and formality which too much prevails among professing Christians at the present day. Religion was a reality—a life business, absorbing their thoughts and actions. And though great abuses afterwards crept into these places, and as civilisation advanced the state of society needed them not; though such institutions are not so calculated to further the free development of Christian graces and the true imitation of Christ, as when we are led to bring the principles of our religion into our every-day life and into our intercourse with the world, still let us not forget what the “religious” in monasteries have done in times gone by, and let us be stimulated by their example to yield unto God a hearty and self-denying service, presenting our bodies, according to the apostle’s entreaty, as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to Him; not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of our minds. Let the remembrance of the way in which the “religious” formerly served God night and day, as it were, enduring hardness, fatigue, and privations, shame the



cold professor out of his ease and indifference, and incite us to renewed endeavours after holiness of life and greater devotion to Christ our Lord and Saviour.

In this light, then, such a passage as we have just quoted as among the omitted ones, may be made useful and profitable to us ; and we see not why it might not be put into future editions of the '*De Imitatione.*'

(3.) There are some passages that have been slightly altered, and rightly so, to adapt them the better to the use of English Churchmen. To give an instance or two—there is one where the word "*Mass*" is changed into *Communion*, and the passage otherwise altered. Translated from the original, it runs thus :—

"In like manner oughtest thou to offer thyself willingly to Me daily in the Mass, for a pure and holy oblation, with all thy powers and affections as much as thou art inwardly able to do."<sup>1</sup>—iv. 8.

Again, a more important change, and one really needed, is made in a passage which savours of transubstantiation, or rather consubstantiation. It is rendered thus from the Latin :—

"A wonderful thing it is, and worthy of all faith, and surpassing all human understanding, that Thou, my Lord God, true God and man, art contained entire under a little form of bread and wine, and, without being consumed, art eaten by the receiver."<sup>2</sup>—iv. 2.

The passage has been altered and brought into a

<sup>1</sup> "Ita debes et tu temet ipsum mihi voluntarie in oblationem puram et sanctam quotidie in Missa cum omnibus viribus et affectibus tuis quam intus vales offerre."

<sup>2</sup> "Mira res et fide digna, ac humanum vincens intellectum, quod tu Domine Deus meus verus Deus et homo sub modica specie panis et vini integer contineris ; et sine consumptione a sumente manducaris."



form more in keeping with the views of the English Church, after this manner :—

“ A thing much to be admired, worthy of all faith, and surpassing man's understanding, that Thou, my Lord God, true God and man, shouldst offer Thyself wholly to us in a little bread and wine, and therein become our inexhaustible support.”

Now, in the former of these two passages there is not much that can be taken exception to, (unless we take up the modern Romish notion about it,) when we consider two or three points. First, as to the term “ Mass,”—it must be remembered that it was formerly applied to all the services of the Church, being derived from a portion of the words with which the assembly was dismissed ; the form being *Ite, missa est*,—“ Go ye, the assembly is dismissed.” This was repeated at the close of the services. The general service was held, at which those who were preparing to be received into full communion in the Church were present, and as they were not permitted to remain at the higher service, when the Holy Communion was administered, they took their departure when the deacon first cried out, “ *Ite, missa est* ;” hence this earlier service was called *Missa Catechumenorum*, whilst the latter was called the *Missa Fidelium* ; so that the word “ Mass ” originally has no direct application to the mystery of the Holy Sacrament itself, since it signifies only the dismissal of the people. It came, however, in time to be applied chiefly, by way of distinction, to the celebration of the Holy Communion. And further still, when the Church of Rome introduced corrupt notions respecting this sacred ordinance, the Reformed Church

of England altogether eschewed the name, since it had little significance in itself; and hence it is now regarded as simply applicable to the rite as administered in the Romish Church. Since, however, this was the word in use for the Holy Communion before the Reformation, and had reference to it in the '*De Imitatione*,' it is not an improper liberty to take to adapt the passage as it has been done. Again, in the Holy Communion, the faithful do present themselves unto the Lord, their souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto Him, so that the exhortation in the '*De Imitatione*' is quite in keeping with what we ought to do when we partake of this Divine Sacrament. And moreover, since the Holy Communion is now celebrated every day in several churches, it is not so inappropriate as it might at first seem, for such as resort to them, to "daily offer themselves to God in that holy service, as a pure and holy oblation." And if others do not daily partake, let the exhortation still stir them up to make a solemn offering of themselves in the Holy Sacrament as frequently as they can communicate.

In the other passage we have named there is something decidedly objectionable, and partakes of the Romish error respecting the nature of the Holy Sacrament. The Church of England does not hold that Christ's natural Body and Blood after consecration is in the Bread and Wine. On the contrary, she says distinctly, "no adoration is intended, or ought to be done, either unto the Sacramental Bread or Wine there bodily received, or unto any Corporal Presence of Christ's natural Flesh and Blood. For the sacra-

mental Bread and Wine remain still in their very natural substances, and therefore may not be adored ; (for that were Idolatry, to be abhorred of all faithful Christians ;) for the natural Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ are in heaven, and not here ; it being against the truth of Christ's natural Body to be at one time in more places than one."—(*See Notice at the end of the Communion Service.*) And yet, though the Church of England does not hold that the Bread and Wine is, after consecration, changed into the natural Body and Blood of Christ, nor that Christ's natural Body and Blood is contained under the form of the Bread and Wine, she does nevertheless acknowledge and confess "that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ." And further, "that the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith."—Art. xxviii.

How Christ does impart Himself to the faithful soul in the Holy Sacrament is indeed a great mystery, which we cannot pretend to explain or understand, but that He does do this, and is really present to the believer in that sacred ordinance, we are fully warranted in believing. As it is the soul that needs nourishment, its food must be spiritual also and of a heavenly and invisible and incomprehensible nature, not corporeal, substantial, nor visible. The flesh, if we

could eat it, by itself profiteth nothing in this respect; "it is the Spirit," saith our Lord, "that quickeneth:" giveth new life and power. As, however, we are assured by our senses that our bodies are strengthened and refreshed by the materials of Bread and Wine, so may we, by faith, be assured that our souls are also strengthened and refreshed by the Body and Blood of Christ, "which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper."—(*See Church Cat.*) Whilst, then, we believe that Christ is present—none less really because spiritually present—and is truly received by the faithful when partaking of the Sacramental Bread and Wine, we cannot, on the other hand, believe that at the consecration by the priest, Christ bodily comes down and dwells or hides Himself in the Bread and Wine; we cannot believe that our Lord and Saviour ties Himself to the material elements; that he is bound up in them, or changes them into Himself, though we gladly and heartily believe that Christ is verily present, and as He will imparts Himself to such and such persons, in receiving the consecrated Bread and Wine, who by faith seek Him and look for His coming to them in all the fulness of His blessed presence.

It is on these grounds that we take exception to the words in the original which we allude to, and think that they have been judiciously altered for the use of English Churchmen.

(4.) Another passage that has been omitted may also well be considered objectionable; it alludes to prayers and masses for the dead. The portion that

has been left out may easily be discernible by the reader in the following quotation, where the brackets are found :—

"I offer unto Thee all the pious desires of the devotees . . . and of all such as have desired and entreated me to offer up prayers (and masses) for themselves and all who belong to them (whether they live as yet in the flesh, or whether they are now departed out of the world), that they all may be sensible of the assistance of Thy grace, the aid of Thy consolation, protection from dangers, deliverance from pains ; and that, being freed from all evils, they may with joy return abundant thanksgiving unto Thee." <sup>1</sup>—IV. 9.

There is a short omission made also in the words that follow, which is marked in the bracket :—

"I also offer unto Thee prayers (and the sacrifice of propitiation, 'hostias placationis'), for those especially who have in anything wronged, grieved, or slandered me."—*Ibid.*

Now, in this latter instance, the meaning is somewhat equivocal ; it may be regarded as simply signifying—"I plead for them the sacrifice of Christ's propitiation, and that for what He endured, they might have pardon, help, and salvation." Or it may signify, as it is more probable, the offering up of Christ afresh in their behalf, in the sacrifice of the Mass, as it is accounted to be done by the Romanists. And lest it should carry this signification with it, the words have been properly excluded.

<sup>1</sup> "Offero quoque tibi omnia pia desideria devotorum . . . et qui orationes et missas pro se suisque omnibus dici a me desideraverunt et petierunt ; sive in carne adhuc vivant sive jam seculo defuncti sint ; ut omnes sibi auxilium gratia tua, operum consolationis, protectionem a periculis, liberationem a penis advenire sentiant ; et ut ab omnibus malis erepti ; gratias tibi magnificas lati persolvant."

The Church of England in her beautiful Consecration Prayer, which for the greater part is very ancient, confesses that when Christ suffered death upon the Cross, "He made *there* (by His one oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." And this is strictly in keeping with the words of Holy Scripture, which are very emphatic upon this point, for St. Paul says, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Heb. ix. 28). And again, "For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14). This is the conclusion of an argument showing that there is no need of a repetition of this Sacrifice of Christ, which was all-sufficient and complete in itself. Under the law the continual offering of sacrifices showed that they were not sufficient of themselves to take away sin, and that a complete atonement had not been made. But Christ's sacrifice which He made of Himself was so effectual that it need not to be repeated, and so complete that He need not tarry on earth any longer. Hence, as the Apostle says, "We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Heb. x. 10, 11, 12).

To hold then the erroneous notion that Christ is again offered up in the Holy Sacrament is to imply that the sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross was not all-



ufficient, and that it was not a complete expiation in itself. To conceive in our minds the idea that Christ is in some mysterious manner crucified afresh every time when the bread is broken and the wine poured out, is to put Him, as it were, again to open shame, and grievously to detract from the meritorious character of that one all-atoning sacrifice. It is, however, not only needless, but impossible, and contrary to the teaching of Holy Scripture, that Christ can in anywise be offered up again; and therefore the words alluded to in the 'De Imitatione' have been properly omitted in many of our English editions.

The Holy Sacrament points to the Sacrifice on the cross—it is a commemoration of it, and vividly reminds us of what Christ suffered for us—showing forth His death until He come; but it is not the reiteration of it,—it is the Feast of the sacrifice, a joyful remembrance of it, a partaking of the benefits of it—it is emphatically called *the Eucharist*.

In the other passage where there is an allusion to prayers and masses being offered up for the dead as well as for the living, we again see the signs of the corrupt teaching of the Romish Church. It is true that in the primitive Church what may be regarded as prayers were offered up for the dead, that is, thanksgivings for their release from the pains, sorrows, and temptations of this mortal life, and petitions that they may rest in peace, and for their final attainment of eternal glory. And something of this is yet retained in the Burial Service, where the priest, praying to God, says, "We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath

pleased Thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world ;" and then continues in these words, " beseeching Thee, that it may please Thee, of Thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of Thine elect, and to hasten Thy kingdom; that we, *with all those that are departed in the true faith of Thy holy Name*, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in Thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord." This is in accordance with what St. Paul says, " That they without us should not be made perfect " (Heb. xi. 40). And in the prayer for the Church Militant they are remembered after this manner, " And we also bless Thy holy Name for all Thy servants departed this life in Thy faith and fear."

There is, we are taught in Holy Scripture, a certain place of blessedness called *Paradise* by our Lord, where the souls of the righteous await the judgment-day, when they will hear the joyful sentence from the lips of Jesus, " Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world " (St. Matt. xxv. 34). For this joyful time they wait with eager expectation ; and some of them are represented as crying out, " How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge them that dwell on the earth ? And white robes were given unto every one of them ; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also, and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled " (Rev. vi. 10, 11). And it is for them that are departed that we pray, as

well as for ourselves, when we say in the Lord's Prayer, *Thy kingdom come*. There is nothing in *this* consolatory doctrine of prayers for the dead that is contrary to Scripture, or need give offence. But upon this custom of the Catholic Church the Romanists have built up the pernicious doctrine of Purgatory, which is, that the souls of the departed are in a certain place purified by fire from the pollution of sin which they have in one way or another contracted in this life, and that they are assisted and the sooner brought out of this sad state by the suffrages of the faithful who are alive, that is, by masses, prayers, and alms. And much evil has arisen from a belief in this dogma; for not only is it a gross superstition imposed upon the people of God, which has no sure warrant in Holy Scripture, and a trade made of it to enrich papal priests, but it leads men to overlook and disregard in their lifetime the atonement of Christ Jesus, and to imagine that there are other means, which can be purchased with money, for taking away sin, besides the blood of Christ. It is this gross fable, and the religious imposition attending its teaching, that has brought the ancient practice of the Church into disrepute, and made men look with suspicion upon prayers for the dead, lest they should have this miserable delusion thrust upon them. In direct opposition to it, the Church of England in her Burial Service, in the very prayer before cited, confesses that "the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, . . . and the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity." There is

no purgatory for them. In the intermediate state, where those who die await the Judgment-Day, there is a separation of the wicked from the righteous; but the latter are in comparative happiness, whilst the former have but fearful anticipations of what is coming upon them.

Those persons who are wishful for more instruction upon this subject, and the view taken of prayers for the dead by the early Church, should read the words of the learned Bishop Bull. See his works, Ser. III. "Concerning the Middle State of Happiness or Misery, allotted by God to every man presently after Death, according as he has been good or bad in his past life, inconsistent with the Popish doctrine of Purgatory." See also Bingham's *Christian Antiquities*, Book XXIII. chap. 3, sect. 13. The passage, however, from the 'De Imitatione' to which we have drawn attention would implicate us to some degree in acknowledging the doctrine of purgatory, and therefore it has been judiciously omitted.

(5.) One other passage that has been left out in most English editions is objectionable also because it urges us to the invocation of saints, or prayers to the departed faithful. It is as follows:—

"It is better to invoke the saints with devout prayers and tears, and to implore their glorious suffrages with an humble mind, than by a vain inquisitiveness to pry into their secrets."<sup>1</sup>  
—III. 58.

We take the term "saints" to apply to the

<sup>1</sup> "Melius est sanctos devotis precibus et lacrimis exorare, et eorum gloriosæ suffragia humili mente implorare; quam eorum secreta vana curiositate perscrutari."

departed faithful, and not to the saints or good men living, because it is by way of general use so regarded, and the dissuasion not to pry into their secrets has a reference to the mystery of their existence after death. And as such the passage has doubtless been rejected and expunged. For prayers *to* the dead,—however eminent they have been in this life for holiness,—or asking them to pray for us, is certainly wrong, and contrary to the revealed will of God. It is something worse than superstition ; it approaches to, if it is not, pure idolatry. We have no ground for knowing or believing that any of the saints departed can hear us ; and hence it is but a waste of our breath and religious fervour, which should be given to God, and in that degree we defraud Him of what is His due. But what is worse is this, that we attribute to the saints departed a Divine prerogative—a power and an honour which belong to God only,—we elevate them from the position of creatures to that dignity which the Creator has reserved for Himself. And as we are told that God is very jealous of His honour, and will not see that which belongs to Him alone given to another with impunity, we should justly fear God's wrath in offering prayers to the saints.

Reason moreover forbids us to believe that they can hear us, for though they are disembodied, and may have other powers of freedom which we in the flesh do not enjoy, they are certainly not omniscient nor omnipresent—else we make them gods at once ; they cannot know what persons are praying to them, they cannot know what they say or pray for. Nor can we



imagine that these spirits of the saints wander up and down from one to another whenever and as often as any one addresses them. Besides, what an existence for them to lead,—hurrying from one to another, burdened with the troubles and prayers of thousands of people continually! This would not be a state of rest and peace for them, and when for the while their souls should be joyfully taken up with the nearer vision of Christ, and with the glorious anticipations of being welcomed by Him into His eternal kingdom.

We should indeed cherish the memory of the saints departed, and follow their examples as imitators of Christ, but the assurance that they are at rest and peace with God should forbid the very thought of disturbing them in that blissful state, by troubling and burdening them with our prayers, which they are not qualified to receive. Sufficient for us that we have One who is fully able to hear us, who is over all, God blessed for ever,—who is ever ready to listen to us and to help us,—even our Saviour Christ, who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, and can at all times be present to us whenever we call upon Him, even from the ends of the world, and who will undertake our cause, and that most effectually, if we come unto God through Him. Let us not then grieve, offend, or slight Him by any act, feeling, or intimation that He is not all-sufficient for us.

We have now mentioned the principal passages that have been omitted; and it is only fair to observe that after all there are but a few short sentences that can be rightly objected to, and which we have not



failed to criticise and censure. Moreover, not only are these points of error which we have named but slightly and alluded to, brought in casually, but the mention of them is rendered comparatively innocuous by the abundance of truth which shines throughout the book of the '*De Imitatione*,' and which seems to controvert the errors incidentally brought in; thus, for instance, when we are taught that there is none to trust in, none who can save us but Jesus, as shown from various passages in the earlier part of this work, it renders the dogma of the invocation to the saints out of place; and when we are urged not to trust in the prayers of others for us after death, but to do now what we can to secure our everlasting happiness, the counsel makes prayers and masses for the dead to be unnecessary. It thus happens that whilst we have some passing reference made to portions of the corrupt system of Romanism, from which the author had emerged in a great degree through the influence of divine truth, which he had deeply studied, he, with this great light illuminating his soul, in the main broke through the incubus of corruption that overlaid the religious profession of the times, and speaking words of wonderful power and simplicity, taught men the vital and vitalising principles of Holy Scripture, whereby they might safely attain eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Whilst these pages were passing through the press, the author's attention was drawn to two or three editions of a new translation published by Messrs. Rivington, in which the omitted passages are inserted, and only altered where needful.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### *Is Justification by Faith overlooked?*

THERE are some criticisms brought against the 'De Imitatione' which cannot be suffered to pass unnoticed, as they are deemed scarcely just. They seem to challenge attention; and since a careful examination of the book may probably lead many to judge otherwise, we here purpose to give some little consideration to them before we close this work.

The first charge which we shall notice is this, *that it overlooks the doctrine of Justification by Faith*,—that it does not clearly acknowledge or set forth this essential truth as the foundation of a new life in Christ. Thus Milner, for instance, in his *History of the Church*, when alluding to the book of the 'De Imitatione' as a work which "abounds with the most pious devotional sentiments, and could not have been written but by one well versed in Christian experience," adds this critical remark, "Though it partakes of the common defect of monastic writers, that is to say, it does not sufficiently illustrate the doctrine of Justification by Faith" (vol. iii. p. 416). Dr. Chalmers also, in an intro-

ductory essay to an edition of the 'De Imitatione,' notices a similar objection by saying, "We have sometimes heard the strenuous argumentation of the author of the following treatise in behalf of holiness excepted against, on the ground that it did not recognise sufficiently the doctrine of Justification by Faith."

The remarks of Dr. Chalmers upon this matter may serve to preface our examination of the objection, since his view of it is shared by several divines. "There is," he says, "in many instances an over-sensitive alarm on this topic, which makes the writer fearful of recommending virtue, and the private disciple as fearful of embarking on the career of it—a sort of jealousy lest the honours and importance of Christ's righteousness should be invaded, by any importance being given to the personal righteousness of the believer, as if the one could not be maintained as the alone valid plea on which the sinner could lay claim to an inheritance in heaven, and at the same time be urged as his indispensable preparation for its exercises and its joys. . . . It is this which, on the pretence of magnifying a most essential doctrine, has, in fact, diffused a mist over the whole field of revelation."

It is not to be wondered at that such an imputation should be made, when we consider how many preachers almost fear to speak of a strict obedience to God's laws, because it is not so popular a theme with a certain class who would have "smooth things" spoken to them; or who shrink from powerfully urging their auditors to holiness of life, and to a resolute pursuit of good works, lest they should be led to trust in what

they do, and to think so much the better of themselves, inclining them thereby to care less for Christ and the atonement He has made for our sins, and consequently to cling the less to Him by faith. It is true that there is a danger in this respect, and men are apt to become self-righteous, and to think more highly of themselves for their good deeds than they should, and thus their faith in Christ as their Saviour becomes weak and imperfect. On the other hand, however, is there not a great danger, if not a greater, in men so professing to trust in Christ and to look to Him for salvation, that they begin to think they need not trouble themselves much about holiness of life, or many good works, but only make an easy, comfortable profession of religion, which costs them nothing—whereby they are made little better for being called Christians, and only lulled into a fatal delusion?

Now what is the way to avoid both one and the other of these dangers? It is faithfully to insist upon holiness of life, a striving after a likeness to Christ, as *the necessary outcome* of a true and living faith in Christ our Saviour. And this is the very ground-work of the '*De Imitatione*,'—the object which it keeps in view,—the principle which pervades the whole book. The author never loses sight of Christ throughout the entire work; it is certainly chiefly by way of urging us to imitate Him, to love Him, and to devote ourselves to Him unreservedly, ay, even passionately. But does not all this presuppose and call for a deep, living, abiding faith in Christ,—a faith which certainly justifies, as we are warranted in believing, when such

fruits manifest themselves? A man cannot love Christ unless he believes in Him; and he that is the more sensible of what Christ has done for him, and who really clings to Him as the Saviour, will love Him all the more—will try to follow Him all the more, and to do His will all the more—after the manner set forth by the author of this excellent work. Though the term “Justification by Faith” is not used, we have in the book the very foundation of it—the life, and the sure signs that justification by faith is deeply and clearly manifested. The words of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ must ever be regarded as addressed to those who are living by faith on Christ—to those who are accounted true believers, and who are anxious to have their faith in Christ strengthened, exalted, and perfected. The self-humiliation and self-condemnation—the preciousness of Christ—the endeavours to become like Him, are the very essential properties of a faith which justifies; and such, as we shall shortly show, are directly taught in the work.

In repelling then the charge here brought against the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ let it not be thought for one moment that the author of it is opposed to the doctrine of justification by faith in its living power, or would overlook it; on the contrary, he tries to draw it forth, to strengthen it, and to illustrate and manifest its reality and life in a thousand various ways. There is no idea of under-rating it—far from it, and we claim the doctrine as contained in the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’

For what is the doctrine of justification by faith?

Nakedly stated, it is that "we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works and deservings" (Art. XI.) But like other important doctrines it does not stand alone: for, first, it must spring out of a deep sense of our own sinfulness and undone condition; secondly, it must rest entirely on Christ for pardon and salvation; and thirdly, it must be evidenced, or show its life by works,—obedience and conformity to God's will—taking the life of Christ for its imitation. These are the three principles of justification by faith: and without them—if you consider the matter well—there is no faith in Christ Jesus whereby we can be accounted righteous before God.

Consider these points for a moment. We are all by nature in a fallen and corrupt condition, so that we are not only stained with sin, and guilty of it, but our very nature, at the core of our being, is sinful, and we are of ourselves inclined to what is evil. And such is our weakness and ruined state, that we cannot in our own strength ever recover ourselves from it, and attain a state of innocency, so as to be acceptable to God. We cannot, by anything that we can do, by any goodness or any sacrifice, wash away the pollution of sin that is inherent in our nature. The Blood of Christ can alone do this. Nothing else can blot out the pollution of sin that is in us. And by His righteousness alone can we be rendered acceptable to God. God is holy and just, and can neither look upon iniquity with satisfaction, nor pass by the punishment of sin, which is hateful to Him. To do one or the



other He must cease to be God—which cannot be. He cannot deny Himself: He must ever be what He is, holy and just, as well as good and merciful; but to make a way to escape from the dreadful penalty of sin, and to make it possible for Him to receive us, as a loving Father, He gave the dearest thing He had for us—even His only beloved Son to die for us, as an atonement for our sin, and that we might come unto God through Him. What we cannot procure or attain to by any works or deservings of our own, then, we can by faith in Christ: for thus are we assured in God's Word, that "to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom. iv. 5); and again, God tells us by His apostle, that He made Him "to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21).

As, then, a deep consciousness of our own sinfulness and undone condition is necessary to lead us to Christ, so a right faith will lead us to rest our hope of pardon and salvation entirely in Him. We shall grasp hold of Christ with all the strength and energy of our soul, and cling to Him as the shipwrecked mariner will to the life-buoy which is to rescue him from a watery grave. He will lay hold of Christ as he would the hand of a dear friend and brother that is stretched out to save him, and will abide with Him. This is the faith which justifies, and whereby we are made acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ. God beholds us as in His only beloved Son, and is well pleased. Hence St. Paul says, "Therefore being justi-

fied by faith we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1). God beholds us in Him as pure and innocent as was Adam before the fall. This is the great mystery, the great truth, the great consolation of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. Wherefore the same apostle says further on, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." But then observe, he adds this safeguard or qualification, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 1). From which we see the necessity of good works and holiness of life as an evidence of faith, that it really exists in us, and is not a mere shadow, name, or fancy, whereby men are apt to deceive themselves. And here we may perceive the difference between works without faith, which cannot render us acceptable to God, and works by faith, or proceeding from the exercise of it, showing that it is a living faith which justifies. Works are the fruits of a real faith; and, to make use of a familiar figure, whilst the fruit of a tree does not make it live and grow, or make it good even, nevertheless the fruit shows it to be so; and without fruit the tree comes under the sentence of the vine respecting which the Master said, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Good works then must necessarily spring out of a true and lively faith in Christ, though a man is not justified by them, but by his faith which produces them. Hence faith without works is as unable to justify us as works without faith. It has been said that a man who comes to Christ without any desire or expectation of being created in Him unto good works,

and having his nature renewed in holiness, is a fool or an infidel. He neither knows nor believes one tittle of the Gospel. And on the other hand, the true believer, the more he lays hold of Christ by faith, takes refuge in Him and realises Him as His Saviour, will be the more anxious to conform his life to that of Christ, and become all that his blessed Lord would have him to be, always endeavouring to do that which is pleasing and acceptable to God. This is the scriptural view of the whole matter. Any one may learn this for himself: take only these words of St. Paul, in two or three places, where he succinctly puts it in a short, comprehensive manner, words which should be carefully weighed over: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. ii. 8, 9, 10). And again: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus ii. 11-14). And then in the next chapter he concludes his gospel-tidings—as to how God of His mercy hath saved us through Christ, without any works of righteousness which we have done—with

these words, "And these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which believed in God should be careful to maintain good works" (Titus iii. 8).

Now, to speak *generally*, this is what the author of the 'De Imitatione' attempts to do—he endeavours to show us what a life of faith in Christ should be, and how we are to pursue it in the various ways in which it is to be manifested. It is faith that will lead a man to become a true follower of Christ, and to imitate His example. A man that has not a living faith within him will not care to do this; he will be indifferent about it. It is faith that will lead us to despise all the vanities of the world; but a man without faith will not mind to do this. Faith is needful to receive the divine mysteries of God's Word (as the doctrine of the Holy Trinity), and to listen and obey its teaching as if God were speaking to us. Faith induces us to suppress inordinate affections—to avoid vain hopes and pride—to deny ourselves often, even in things lawful—to be subject to those who are over us—to be patient under adversities—to resist temptations—to avoid censuring others—to bear with the faults of others—to do many acts of kindness even to enemies, and to those who are not with us, or can give us anything in return. It leads us to cultivate a closer intimacy with Jesus, a deeper and more fervent love for Him, and to be ready to bear and suffer all things for His sake. The fruits of faith are indeed manifold, and as we go through the book of the 'De Imitatione' we should find signs of them everywhere:—such things as a man will care for, and do, who has a lively faith

in Christ, but which a man devoid of faith is heedless about, has no heart for. And look again how in the third and fourth books we are carried on to the exercise of spiritual communion with God, and to the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the devout reception of the Lord's Supper, which none but those who have a faith that justifies will thus attend to so heartily as set forth; so that the whole book may be viewed as pointing out to us the manner and way in which those who truly believe in Christ will live. Thus in general it may be said to exemplify a justifying faith, in opposition to a dead, inoperative, fruitless faith, which is but a counterfeit, and deceives such vast numbers of people.

But to speak *more particularly*, and to point the reader to definite passages where the very principles of the doctrine of justification are woven into the very texture of the book, we would have the reader meanwhile to bear in mind the necessary properties of this doctrine—which we have just propounded, viz.—(1.) a deep sense of our own sinful, helpless, and undone condition; (2.) an entire reliance on Christ alone for pardon and salvation; (3.) a following of Christ and obedience to His will as evidence of the faith within us; and we would ask, Is not the doctrine clearly discernible as forming an essential element in the character of the work. in the following passages?

Christ is represented as saying to a disciple who turns his mind to outward things:—

“Hence it cometh to pass that all doth little profit thee, until thou well consider that I am He that doth rescue them



that trust in Him ; and that out of Me there is neither powerful help nor profitable counsel nor lasting remedy. But do thou having recovered breath after the tempest, gather strength again in the light of My mercies ; for I am at hand (saith the Lord) to repair all, not only entirely, but also abundantly and in most plentiful measure.

"Is there anything hard to Me ? Or shall I be like unto one that promiseth and performeth not ? Where is thy faith ! Stand firmly and with perseverance ; take courage and be patient ; comfort will come to thee in due time. Wait, wait, I say, for Me : I will come and heal thee."—*Imit.* III. 30.

If the writer of the ' *De Imitatione* ' had not taught us to rest by faith on God's mercy through Christ, and to cease to trust in our own works or deservings, would he have been likely to write these words ?—

"I remember not that I have done any good, but that I have been always prone to sin and slow to amendment. . . . What have I deserved for my sins but hell and everlasting fire ? . . . And although I be unwilling to hear this, yet notwithstanding, for the truth's sake, I will lay open my sins against myself, that so the more readily I may be counted worthy to obtain Thy mercy. What shall I say, in that I am guilty and full of confusion ? My mouth can utter nothing but this word only, 'I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned ; have mercy on me, pardon me.'

"What dost thou so much require of a guilty and miserable sinner, as that he be contrite, and that he humble himself for his offences ? Of true contrition and humbling of the heart ariseth hope of forgiveness ; the troubled conscience is reconciled ; the favour of God, which was lost, is recovered ; man is preserved from the wrath to come ; and God and the penitent soul meet together with a holy kiss."—*Imit.* III. 52.

Moreover, there is a vein of the same fundamental truth running throughout the whole volume, which shows that the doctrine of justification by faith, in its integrity rather than in a mere verbal definition, lies



at the basis of the teaching in the 'De Imitatione.' Thus in the first book we read : -

"Seeing that by sin we have lost our innocency, we have together with that lost also the true felicity. And therefore it becomes us to have patience and to wait for the mercy of God, till this tyranny be overpast and mortality be swallowed up of life."—*Imit.* i. 22.

"Good cause have we therefore to humble ourselves, and never to have any great conceit of ourselves, since we are so frail and inconstant."—*Imit.* i. 23.

"He that cleaveth unto creatures shall fall with that which is subject to fall. He that embraceth Jesus shall stand firmly for ever.

"If a man do not seek Jesus, he is more hurtful to himself than the whole world and all his enemies could be."—*Imit.* ii. 7.

In the third book, again, we find the writer praying after this manner :—

"O Lord my God, who hast created me after Thine own image and likeness, grant me this grace which Thou hast showed to be so great and so necessary to salvation, that I may overcome my most evil nature, which draweth me to sin and perdition. For I feel in my flesh the law of sin contradicting the law of my mind and leading me captive to the obeying of sensuality in many things, neither can I resist the passions thereof, unless Thy most holy grace being infused into my heart do assist me.

"O Lord, how entirely needful is Thy grace for me, to begin any good work, to go on with it, and to accomplish it. For without that grace I can do nothing, but in Thee I can do all things, when Thy grace doth strengthen me."—*Imit.* iii. 55.

And in the fourth book we read these most expressive words :—

"Nevertheless our coldness and negligence is much to be bewailed and pitied, that we are not drawn with greater affection

to receive Christ, in whom doth consist all the hope of those that are to be saved, and all their merit. For He Himself is our Sanctification and Redemption."—*Imit.* iv. 1.

"Forgive me, O God, forgive me my sins for the sake of Thy holy Name; save Thou my soul, which Thou hast redeemed with Thy most precious Blood. Behold, I commit myself to Thy mercy, I resign myself into Thy hands."—*Imit.* iv. 9.

There is no need for proofs to show the third point, that the Imitation of Christ, or holiness of life, is insisted upon, for this is admitted, since the whole structure of the book is in this direction. These passages, however, which we have cited, taken from all the four books of the '*De Imitatione*,' confirm what has been said, and undoubtedly afford sufficient evidence that the doctrine of justification by faith is not overlooked, but directly inculcated, though the term itself is not used. For what is definitely taught in the words we have quoted but the very principles of the doctrine as already laid down, that we must have no trust or hope of salvation in ourselves, or on our good works or deservings; and that we must look to Christ alone, and depend wholly upon Him for it; whilst at the same time we show our faith in Him by newness of life, being created again after His image?

We think then that the charge made against the '*De Imitatione*,' that it does not sufficiently illustrate the doctrine of justification by faith—is needless and uncalled for; and though it may have this appearance to some minds, the idea mainly arises from holding a narrow or one-sided view of the truth, which does not take in the whole counsel of God, and holding only a part, which though undoubtedly most essential, is not

the whole, and requires a "Shibboleth," which as much as tells us, Speak as we do—couch your religious opinions and sentiments in a certain phraseology, and we will accept them; but if you will not, we shall consider them deficient, and put a ban upon them as not wholly satisfactory.

When, however, justification by faith is solely or mainly dwelt upon, whilst the necessity of imitating Christ, and obedience to God's will and holiness of life—which are as one—is kept out of sight, these two things are apt to arise: men begin to perplex themselves about their having faith, and set themselves to analyse their minds about it, to see if they have it, and make it their own, as something within themselves to depend upon for salvation, rather than on Christ their Saviour; for real faith is only as the hand stretched out to lay hold of Christ, and which clings to Him, and is not any mere conception or operation of the mind that is confined to a man himself. Or, they are led to think that if they accept the doctrine of justification by faith there is a danger in good works or a holy life, lest they should trust in themselves too much, and neglect Christ; and therefore they are apt to conceive that if they keep from any great sin, they will do very well as they are, without much striving after greater devotion; and thus the true spirit of religion, the real influence of faith, the working of God's grace, is repressed within them, is not developed and strengthened; and so it happens that we see in these days such vast numbers of professing Christians living stunted religious lives—remaining imperfect

Christians—devoid of holy zeal, of that striving impetuosity and violence which, as it were, would take heaven by force rather than perish; we see those bearing the name of Christ doing little or nothing for Him, nothing to adorn the doctrine of Christ, in their daily course,—not living, in any true sense of the expression, “unto Him that loved them, and gave Himself for them.”

Those who are commended in the holy Gospels for their faith in Christ showed its reality within them by their prompt obedience to His word or their pre-eminent trust in what He said; and it is because the ‘De Imitatione’ would have us to manifest in like manner a strong and vigorous faith in Christ, by giving our whole heart and soul and strength to do God’s will, and by seeking to have within us more perfectly the mind that was in Christ Jesus, that it is to be so highly valued; for, in one word, it shows us how “the just *shall live* by faith.”

## CHAPTER XXXI.

*Does the 'De Imitatione' teach an absolutely selfish religion?*

THE severest criticism, however, upon the book of the 'De Imitatione' is from a pen which has touched upon its excellency in terms of the highest praise; and it is therefore with some diffidence and shrinking that we meet the charge; and the more so, because it comes from no mean hand, but one of much learning and experience in letters, and because there is, we allow, some little ground for it, as we have already shown, but scarcely to the extent as given below. Hence it seems necessary to enter upon a defence of the book against this attack, so as to distinguish its real character.

Milman, in his *History of Latin Christianity*, after describing the book in the glowing language which we have noticed in the early portion of this work, suddenly turns, and passes the most withering, and as if has been considered by no means justifiable, censure upon it; declaring that its object is purely selfish, though it be a religious selfishness. Here are his words, and we had best look them fairly in the face:—

"It is absolutely and entirely selfish in its aims and in its acts. Its sole, single, exclusive object is the purification, the elevation of the individual soul, of the man absolutely isolated from his kind, of the man dwelling alone in the solitude, in the hermitage of his own thoughts; with no fears or hopes, no sympathies of our common nature; he has absolutely withdrawn and secluded himself, not only from the cares, the sins, the trials, but from the duties, the connections, the moral and religious life of the world. Never was misnomer so glaring, if justly considered, as the title of the book, 'The Imitation of Christ.' That which distinguishes Christ, that which distinguishes Christ's apostles, that which distinguishes Christ's religion—the Love of Man—is entirely and absolutely left out. Had this been the whole of Christianity, our Lord Himself (with reverence be it said) had lived like an Essene, working out or displaying his own sinless perfection by the Dead Sea; neither on the Mount, nor in the Temple, nor even on the Cross. The apostles had dwelt entirely on the internal emotions of their own souls, each by himself, St. Peter still by the Lake of Gennesaret, St. Paul in the desert of Arabia, St. John in Patmos. Christianity had been without any exquisite precept for the purity, the happiness of social or domestic life; without self-sacrifice for the good of others; without the higher Christian patriotism; devotion on evangelic principles to the public weal; without even the devotion of the missionary for the dissemination of gospel truth; without the humbler and greater daily self-sacrifice for relatives, for the wife, the parent, the child. Christianity had never soared to be the civiliser of the world. 'Let the world perish, so the single soul can escape on its solitary plank from the general wreck,'—such had been its final axiom. The 'Imitation of Christ' begins in self, terminates in self. The simple exemplary sentence, 'He went about doing good,' is wanting in the monastic gospel of this pious zealot. Of feeding the hungry, of clothing the naked, of visiting the prisoner, even of preaching, there is profound, total silence. The world is dead to the votary of the 'Imitation,' and he is dead to the world, dead in a sense absolutely repudiated by the first vital principles of the Christian faith."—Vol. ix. book xiv. chap. iii.

One is almost confounded at reading such a sweep-



ing charge against this book, which is so much valued by all classes of Christians, that we think that if it were true, many great and good men must have seriously erred in their estimate of it. But let the reader have patience a while till he can look narrowly into the question.

We regret also to find that Dr. Farrar, seeking inspiration from this source, has followed somewhat in the same strain, though in a milder degree. Having said of the writer of the '*De Imitatione*,—

"It is as though for him the flames of some physical Gehenna had flung their lurid glare across the world, and left it without one fountain for our refreshment, without one flower of duty to bloom unscorched beside the path of life,"

he goes on to say—

"And perhaps this is sufficient to account for the worst defect of the '*Imitatio*,' which is its marvellous self-absorption. It is not of course the vulgar selfishness of personal indulgence, but still it is selfishness, though directed wholly to spiritual ends. The entire book is founded upon the erroneous assumption that man's sole work in this world is to work out his own personal salvation—to secure, amid universal conflagration, his individual safety. He seems to have no other conception of sainthood, save that of the Cœnobite; no other ideal of perfection save that of the hermit of the wilderness. . . . The '*Imitatio*,' from beginning to end, does not catch a glimpse of that truth which has been so brilliantly illustrated in the Eastern legend,"—

how a certain one saw an angel writing down in a book of gold the names of those who loved their Lord, and when he found his own name was not down, bid the angel to put it therein, "as one that loves his

fellow-men," and when he next inquired, he found his name "led all the rest."

And again he says (for we must not shrink from quoting these most severe and cutting words, and then forming our own judgment upon a careful examination of the work):—

"The 'Imitatio' says, Abase thy reason. Christ says, Enlighten it. The 'Imitatio' says, Annihilate the lower parts of thy nature; the voice of Christ bids us only control and ennoble them. The 'Imitatio' teaches us to treat the body as an enemy: the Gospel of Christ bids us train it in sanctity and honour. The 'Imitatio' urges us to shun all human intercourse: the gospel teaches us to be kindly among our kind. The 'Imitatio' bids us fly from the wicked world; the gospel bids us to be ready even to die to make it better. The 'Imitatio' aims at the salvation of the individual; Christ came to die for all the race."—*Ser. on Imit.*, pp. 21, 22, 23.

Now, in reply to these bitter, wholesale charges,—for there are several points taken up—we would say *first*, that if the book of the 'De Imitatione' were so thoroughly permeated with error, and with perverted views of religion, from beginning to end, it were better not to recommend the book at all; and we can hardly understand why both one and the other of the critics we have just named should have so fully and unreservedly lauded the great value of the book in one part, and then so sarcastically and completely condemned it in another. It is blowing hot and cold, as it were, with the same mouth; the sending forth from the same fountain waters that are both sweet and bitter; hence many persons may be perplexed what to think of the work, when reviewed after this fashion.

(1.) And *first*, What is this religious or spiritual selfishness which is spoken against? Is it not this, that a man is taught that he should especially attend to the saving of his own soul—that this is the first thing he should attend to, when awakened to a knowledge of divine truth, and a matter that must pre-eminently engage his attention all through life, even to the end; and that the most strenuous efforts must be made by him individually to do this, by subduing all carnal affections within himself, and keeping the flesh in subjection; by watching and striving, by himself, against temptations to sin; by personally, for himself, seeking the pardon of his sins; and individually himself asking for fresh grace that he may do the will of God more perfectly; and that he himself may persevere in truly serving God all the days of his life? And if so—and it is difficult to understand what the charge is, unless it amounts to this,—then is this spiritual selfishness, if they will so call it, true religion. We do not say that it should stay with self, which may be implied in the charge—to this point we shall come presently—but we do say that there can be no true religion in a man, unless he himself is personally the subject of that religion, first and before all his efforts to do good to others, unless he is personally influenced by it, unless he is affected, converted by it, and led himself to shun all evil desires, and to strive after a new and better life. Unless a man himself is thoroughly imbued with religion, and heartily engages in its sacred exercises, we regard his profession of Christianity as little worth; for his philanthropy alone cannot make or constitute

him a Christian ; and in proportion to his own personal neglect of Christ, even though he may busy himself about the salvation of others, he is so far, and in that degree, but a sham, and a false professor.

A quaint writer somewhere says—whilst commenting on the words of the Blessed Virgin Mary, when she says, “ My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour,”—that there is a great amount of divinity in pronouns, and that every one should have both a *personal faith* in Christ, so as to call Him “ *my Saviour*,” and a *personal devotion*, so as to be able to say, “ *my soul, my spirit*, doth magnify . . . hath rejoiced.” There must be an appropriation of Christ to himself, so to speak, by every one that would be saved ; and every one that doeth this should love the Saviour intensely, so as to magnify Him and rejoice in Him. How much there is too of this personal religion in the Psalms ; it is one of its peculiar beauties and excellencies, which has endeared it as a book of devotion for all generations ! “ O God, Thou art *my God* ; early will I seek Thee ! *My soul* thirsteth for Thee, *my flesh* also longeth after Thee !” (Ps. lxiii. 1, 2.) “ Thou art *my Helper* and Redeemer ! Make no long tarrying, O *my God* !” (Ps. xl. 17.) “ The Lord is *my strength* and *my song*, and is become *my salvation*. . . Thou art *my God*, and I will thank Thee ; Thou art *my God*, and I will praise Thee ” (Ps. cxvii. 14, 28). Notice this personal application of religion especially in the 51st Psalm, in the 38th, 39th, 40th, 42d, 43d, and many other Psalms.

This religion that mightily affects a man's self, which first sets him at work on himself, and makes him, as it were, to be wholly absorbed in its pursuit, is, we see, the very religion that the Bible teaches, and which our Saviour would inculcate. "What must I do to be saved?" is the first question of the awakened soul. "Herein," saith St. Paul, "do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men" (Acts xxiv. 16). "I have suffered the loss of all things," saith the apostle, "and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, . . . that I may know Him. . . . If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I might apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." "This one thing I do"—as if it must come before all else—"I press towards the mark for the prize," etc. (Phil. iii. 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14). "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. . . . I can do all things through Christ" (Phil. iv. 11, 12, 13). And again, "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. ix. 26, 27).

Is, then, St. Paul's religion to be considered selfish because he primarily and so ardently attended to the welfare of his own soul? Are we to charge St. Paul

with saying, "Let the world perish, so that I escape from the general wreck"? If we were bent upon carping at his language we might term him egotistical: the pronoun "I" so constantly crops up that we cannot help seeing what a personal thing the religion of Christ was to him, and how his very self was constantly and intensely affected by it. And are not the very exhortations of Christ touching a man's self?—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you" (St. Matt. vi. 33). "But *thou*, when *thou* prayest, enter into *thy* closet, and when *thou* hast shut *thy* door, pray to *thy* Father, which is in secret" (St. Matt. vi. 6). And the earnest admonitions of His apostles?—"Work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. ii. 12). "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold of eternal life, whereunto *thou* art called" (1 Tim. vi. 12). But there are numberless such passages; and, we ask, are they not designed to affect every man's self, to stir him up to begin with himself, before ever he thinks of attending to the souls of others; that he himself, in his own person, should come thoroughly under the influence of true religion? And yet we do not think of laying any accusation against such teaching as being selfish, though having a spiritual aim, or tending to foster selfishness of a religious kind; for it is well known that this thorough personal religion makes a man humble and kind, ready to give up his own will the more to do God's will, to prefer others before himself. And it is in a similar light, we think, that the 'De Imitatione' should be



viewed, save and except perhaps in a few such passages as we have before pointed out ; for we do not think there is much more ground for bringing such a charge against it, for being selfish in its teaching, than there would be against many parts of Holy Scripture.

A man who is not himself thoroughly imbued with Christ's religion, and has not himself become a true disciple, is not likely to do much good in bringing others to seek salvation, however he may busy himself in religious matters ; but on the other hand, the more a man's self, body, soul, and spirit, is moved, and kindled by the salvation he has laid hold of, the greater influence will he have among men, and the far more likely will he be an effectual instrument in God's hands of saving souls ; for men will take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus, and that his religion is a matter of very life to him himself, which it behoves them also seriously to attend to. And it is on this very account, because the '*De Imitatione*' seeks to imbue every man himself with a vital Christianity, that it is to be so highly valued.

There is, moreover, a sophistry in this harsh attack upon a life thoroughly in earnest after its salvation, which it is difficult to unravel, and yet it contains so dangerous a sentiment that we must not hesitate to expose and condemn it. And it is of so much moment to do this effectually, that it requires a master's hand to deal with it in the trenchant manner that is needed, and we prefer to quote the words of a recent writer,

who is fully able to grapple with the question, and whose words—though directed against a similar charge from an enemy of the faith—seem very apposite and applicable to the criticism before us. He says:—

“One mode of self-love is a wrong relation to others,—a man pursuing his own advantage at the expense of others; another is the pure relation of a man to himself. By virtue of this relation he necessarily wishes his own good; the wish is included in his conscious existence, and is no more selfish in him than it is selfish in him to *be* himself. But the Comtist confounds these two acts, and takes the term selfish from its true application to a man's wrong relation to others, to apply it to his naked relationship to himself. To take from under man, however, this fundamental relationship to himself, is not to raise him to a higher pinnacle of purity, but rather to fling human nature down a precipice and shatter it into fragments.”

And again:—

“Those, then, who thus degrade, under the name of selfishness, all those solemn feelings and profound wishes that a man has respecting himself and what he is to be, are arguing from a word. It relates to self, they say, and is therefore selfish. But, —we would ask of one who thus reasons,—when you come to the *actual* in man, can you deny that there is something excellent and lofty in pursuing the good of a distant and supernatural sphere from which he is divided by a whole gulf of being? Can you help yourself recognising a nobility in this reaching forward toward the happiness of an unseen world at the sacrifice of the present, though it is his own happiness that he aims at? Is it not something which you cannot help morally admiring, though it is for himself that he wishes? And if so, is not your argument from self gone? You have been reasoning from a word, but when it comes to the reality, your moral sense will not allow you practically to call such a man a selfish man. You confess that under certain circum-

stances there is something high in the pursuit of one's own good; and what is real, what in fact shoves aside what is verbal and abstract. . . .

"The Christian confessor and martyr, then, who gave up this world to obtain the glory of the next, was, according to the new philosophers, selfish; he aimed at his own gratification. 'He should have learnt,' say they, 'from another school, the true spirit of self abandonment. Behold the genuine confessor the authentic martyr; we keep the good of this solid material world indeed, but all our interest in heaven we unreservedly surrender; we give it up without a murmur: ours is the very romance of self sacrifice which has left the Gospel standard far behind;—the last discovery of moral progress.'"<sup>1</sup>

(2.) Another consideration which should incline one to make some abatement in the severe judgment which has been passed upon the book is, that more should not be looked for in the '*De Imitatione*' than was designed by its author, or we may be adopting a Quixotic mode of criticism, which is both arbitrary and unfair, if not unjust, and that is, by seeking out some imaginary defect which has but the shadow of an existence, and magnifying it into a huge evil that needs the full tilt of our intellectual weapons to demolish. We have no ground for supposing that the book was meant by its author to comprehend the whole duty of man. An examination of its contents leads us rather to regard it as the collected experiences of some very devout soul, who has set forth the hidden life with God which he himself pursued; and would show us how it is to be sought after, attained, advanced, and perfected; and as such a book it has no equal that

<sup>1</sup> Mozley's *Univ. Ser.*, pp. 63-69. See also Bp. Butler, Discourse 21, and his remarks in the Preface upon it.

we are aware of. The author has kept to this kind of teaching as his main design,—as the very core or essence of true religion—and hence he has not attempted to enter at any length into the practical fulfilment of our duty towards our neighbour; feeling, doubtless, that to have our hearts wholly given to God, and to do His will, is the vital principle of religion—the very key—the royal way—to enter aright upon the other duties of life, and truly to love our neighbours as ourselves. In a book upon the cultivation of flowers we should not look for a detailed account of the cultivation of vegetables, nor in a treatise on “Our Duty to God” should we expect to find a full description of “Our Duty towards our Neighbour,” though some allusion to it might be made; nor would it be fair to draw the inference, that a man did not care for the cultivation of vegetables because he spoke only of flowers; or that a man did not care for his neighbour because he spoke only of the love of God; so in this book of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ which deals professedly with the cultivation of Personal Religion, we must not demand to have a particular account of our outward conduct towards others; sufficient if there be an occasional reference to it, to show that it is not forgotten or disregarded by the author, whilst he chiefly occupies himself with fully setting forth the subject he has in hand. Indeed it is generally considered to be much better, in any kind of discourse, to keep to the point or matter before us, than to become discursive, and wander off to other subjects in a general way, which could be better treated separately. Nor are we to

imagine the writer to be regardless of the welfare of his fellow-creatures, or that he would teach men so to be, because he does not in the book enter into a more particular description of the various ways in which we may do good to others. It is one of the best books of religion which has appeared of late years, viz., Dean Guillebert's volume on *Personal Religion*, in which his design is to show us how we may attain to a real, though gradual, growth in sanctity of life, there is but little allusion to our doing good to others, because he is occupied with another and, let us say, higher subject, viz., sanctification of the heart through the love of God. Indeed, we may undertake to assert that there is more instruction about benefiting our neighbours in the 'De Imitatione' than there is in it; and yet we would not dare to say that the book was therefore "absolutely and entirely selfish in its aims and in its acts." We could not say that "the entire book was founded upon the erroneous assumption that man's sole work in this world is to work out his own personal salvation—to secure, amid universal conflagration, his individual safety." Nor should we be inclined to say that the writer has "no other conception of sainthood save that of the Cœnobite, no other ideal of perfection save that of the hermit in the wilderness." It would be as unfair as it would be unjust to insinuate that which the writer would be the first to repudiate. And what we would say in this case, we would say to those who have, after a like manner, so unwarrantably assailed the 'De Imitatione,'—their censures of it are as unjust as they are unfair. They have applied a criti-

cism to it which they would not dare to do to another book of a similar character.

It is a well-known fact to those who have given any attention to the subject, and it is acknowledged by the controversialists on all sides, that the title '*De Imitatione Christi*' was not originally applied to the whole four books, or even to the first book, but only to the first chapter of the first book, and probably only to the first part of the first chapter of the first book, for that chapter has two headings; the latter part of the chapter being "on the Contempt of the Vanities of the World," while only the first part is "on the Imitation of Christ." It was necessary, however, to have some title to the book, and no general title having been adopted, that came to be given to it which related to the first subject or point that the book touched upon;—a method which is even now occasionally adopted when needful, the first subject in the book being taken as the title to the whole, though the rest of the book may embrace a variety of subjects. This is frequently the case in books of poetry.

We allow that the book may be called a "misnomer," we cannot say a "glaring misnomer;" but even the term, without the adjective, is not the fault of the author, or the fault of the book, but of those who misjudge the character of the book from the title it has obtained, and sneak of it as if it should be entirely confined to this one point. And how can it be termed a "glaring misnomer" when the *Imitation of Christ* is so very frequently referred to in the book, though it be not limited strictly to this, or may not in all points



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enter upon it fully! In truth, the devout reader will feel that even when the example of Christ is not directly mentioned the author is teaching us how to attain to the mind which was in Him, especially where he bids us refer all things to God, and seek to know and do His will rather than our own.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

*The regard for others exhibited in the 'De Imitatione,'  
and the indications of Holy Joy, etc.*

**B**UT another consideration forces itself upon our notice, and it is this, Is it true that the book is devoid of any regard for the welfare of others—that there is no mention of doing good to those about us—no allusion to social intercourse—no thought of the public weal? is there no sign of the missionary spirit to be found in it? Are we justified in acknowledging that the universal character of the book is, "Let the world perish, so the single soul can escape on its solitary plank from the general wreck," and thus acquiesce in disparaging it?

We have carefully gone over the book again, with this adverse criticism before us, to ascertain whether it be true, or what degree of truth there is in it, and we still regard it as harsh in the extreme, and undeserved. We have before alluded to the unfairness of condemning an author for not entering fully upon a subject which does not come within his purpose, or, in other words, censuring him for what he has left unsaid. This, however, is a negative reply to the charge, and

it is necessary to proceed further; and this we are ready to do, for we are prepared to show *positively* that the allegation is incorrect, and far from being wholly true; and this we shall do by bringing forward various passages from the 'De Imitatione' which clearly prove that whilst the author kept mainly to the subject in hand, i.e. the training of the soul for a life of devotion to God, he did not entirely omit to mention, and even to urge upon us, the duty of doing good to all.

But first, as a preliminary question, let us ask, Is not the very book itself a plain and positive contradiction to the charge that is laid against it? Is not the very aim and object of the 'De Imitatione' really a missionary one in its highest sense, viz., to bring souls into communion with God,—to be really at one with Him, through Christ Jesus, whom it teaches us how to love with our whole heart and strength? If the author had thought only of himself, and aimed solely at his own salvation, would he have been at the trouble and the pains to have written such a book? Does it not in itself show, as a whole, that he was anxious to win souls for Christ—to bring them to a living union with Him; that he desired above all things to show them the good and the right way, and how they might attain to a higher and closer walk with God, that they might be saved as well as himself? In writing the 'De Imitatione' the author had in view the everlasting welfare of many around him, and many to whom his words might become known, who were then unknown to him, but whom he hoped to benefit by what he wrote. He in purpose of soul and earnest endeavour

goes forth to them as a missionary, and says, 'I will show you how I have found peace with God, and how you also may do so, and find a blessing in being truly and thoroughly religious.' The very structure and character of the book, we contend, manifests a yearning of soul, an intense desire to get other souls to draw nearer to God and to heaven; to cling closer and more lovingly to Christ our Lord; and to seek after their own salvation with all earnestness, even with fear and trembling, lest by carelessness or the following their own wills and ways, they might after all be lost. In short, if the author would have let others perish, so he himself alone could be saved—if this spirit pervaded him,—the '*De Imitatione*' would never have been written.

But more than this: instead of precluding the exercise of charity, we continually find him pointing out in various parts how we should do good to others; and instead of having a devout soul to keep asunder from and to shun all intercourse with his fellow-kind, we may notice how he counsels him to cherish the society of good men. Indeed, he encourages the pursuit of the purity and happiness of social life. Even so much so, that his words seem at variance with those passages to which we ourselves have alluded and taken exception, viz., respecting a solitary life, and the rooting out of our hearts all interest in others, and which led us to say that those passages should be received with some qualification.

In short, we may to a certain extent reverse the decision of one of the critics of the '*De Imitatione*,'

and say that "from beginning to end" we often catch a glimpse of that truth which is illustrated in the Eastern legend—that the author of it is "as one that loves his fellow-men."

We would ask the reader, however, to judge for himself in the matter, from some of the passages which we shall bring forward. Surely the following words are not the sentiments of one whose sole object is the elevation "of the man absolutely isolated from his kind, of the man dwelling alone in the solitude, in the hermitage of his own thoughts; with no fears or hopes; no sympathies of our common nature, and absolutely withdrawn and secluded from the duties, the connections, the moral and religious fate of the world."

"Keep company," says the author of the '*De Imitatione*,' "with the humble and single-hearted, with the devout and virtuous, and confer with them of those things that may edify." "Treat of thy affairs with the wise, and such as fear God."

And again:—

"We must have *love towards all*, but familiarity with all is not expedient."—*Imit.* i. 8.

"Often take counsel in temptations, and deal not roughly with him that is tempted; but give him comfort, as thou wouldest wish to be done to thyself."—*Imit.* i. 13.

However such a passage may appear to some, it seems to us as the very stretching out of the hand to a tempest-tossed and struggling fellow-creature, to help him on to that "solitary plank" whereby we ourselves would escape from the danger of perishing in the general wreck. It is indeed one of the most effectual ways in seeking to save others, to deal kindly with them in times of trial, and to give them such

friendly counsel as we ourselves should most need when similarly circumstanced.

And this is not a solitary passage; many others present themselves, and the counsels attached to them are much to be valued. Thus, for instance:—

“For the welfare of one that standeth in need, a good work is sometimes to be intermitted without any scruple, or even to be changed for a better. For by doing this, a *good work* is not lost, but changed into a better.”—*Imit.* i. 15.

Surely these words do not sound as if the author of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ had “forgotten or ignored” the maxim, “that Life is not only worship, but service; that to each of us and to all, God intrusts the love and care of each and all; that love to Him our Father is best shown by love to man our brother;” for he inculcates upon us this very nobleness of life, as also that it should be undertaken from true and right motives. But to proceed with a few more words from the same chapter:—

“Without charity the outward work profiteth nothing; but whatsoever is done of charity, be it never so little or contemptible in the sight of the world, it becomes wholly fruitful. For God weigheth more with how much love a man worketh, than how much he doeth. He doeth much that loveth much. . . . He doeth well that serveth the common weal more than his own will.”—*Imit.* i. 15.

With such passages as these before us, how can it be said, with any degree of truth, that “that which distinguishes Christ, that which distinguishes Christ’s apostles, that which distinguishes Christ’s religion—the love of man—is entirely and absolutely left out” of the ‘*De Imitatione*’? It is difficult to conceive



how such a judgment could have been passed upon the book but from a want of knowing it better.

Consider also this passage, which further shows us that we may find instruction other than that solely relating to "the elevation of the individual soul of the man absolutely separated from his kind :"—

"If all men were perfect, what should we have to suffer of our neighbour for the sake of God? But now God hath so ordered it, that we may learn to bear one another's burdens; for no man is without fault; no man but hath his burden; no man is sufficient of himself; no man is wise enough of himself, but we ought to bear with one another, comfort one another, help instruct, and admonish one another."—*Imit.* l. 16.

How refreshing it is to have such a breath of pure air, coming as it were across our path from the everlasting hills—loving counsel drawn from the Word of life, teaching us to have compassion one of another, and to exercise a reciprocation of Christian love amid the fears and hopes, and "sympathies of our common nature." Some consideration for the welfare of others crops up too at the close of the following sentence :—

"Never be entirely idle; but either be reading, or writing, or praying, or meditating, or *endeavouring something for the public good.*"—*Imit.* l. 19.

Passages however accumulate as we proceed, and we shall not hold back from bringing them forward, as it will more convincingly show how unmerited this hostile judgment upon the work has been :—

"Be not ashamed to serve others for the love of Jesus Christ."—*Imit.* l. 7.

"Whilst thou art in health thou mayest do much good, but when thou art sick, I see not what thou wilt be able to do. — *Imit.* l. 23.

Speaking of the day of judgment, the author of the 'De Imitatione' says :—

"Then shall good works avail more than many goodly words."—*Imit.* i. 24.

Then we have him quoting a passage of Scripture upon this point, as part of our duty and as bringing a blessing upon our life :—

"'Trust in the Lord, and do good,' saith the prophet, 'so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.'"—*Imit.* i. 25.

The two great commandments are here put side by side and commended to us in preference to self-seeking :—

"If thou intend and seek nothing else but the will of God and the good of thy neighbour, thou shalt thoroughly enjoy inward liberty."—*Imit.* ii. 4.

So also in the following passage, a life of benevolence, pursued in a lowly spirit, is to be considered as a mark of great grace; and if this be selfishness directed solely to spiritual ends, it is to be coveted :—

"To be always doing good, and to esteem little of one's-self, is the sign of a humble soul."—*Imit.* ii. 6.

We are instructed as regards the virtue of patience toward others, and wherein it may be truly exemplified; and it is no small matter to know how to bear ourselves towards those who oppose us with meekness; it is rather a striking characteristic of Christ's life, and to be cherished :—

"He is not truly patient who is willing to suffer only so much as he thinks good, and from whom he pleases. But the truly patient man minds not by whom he is exercised, whether by his superiors, by one of his equals, or by an inferior; whether by a good and holy man, or by one that is perverse and un-

worthy. But indifferently from every creature, how much soever and how often soever anything adverse befall him, he takes it all thankfully as from the hands of God, and esteems it great gain."—*Imit.* III. 19.

It is evident that the author of this work is not insensible either to the high value of Christian friendship; for he intimates that there is great good and delight to be found in our intercourse with those we love; but he teaches us how we are to esteem them, as in the Lord, and by the Lord's good pleasure. Thus Christ is represented as speaking to the Christian soul:—

"Thy regard for thy friend ought to be grounded in Me, and for My sake he is to be beloved, whosoever he be that thou thinkest well of, and who is very dear unto thee in this life.

"Without Me, friendship hath no strength and no continuance; neither is that love true and pure which is not knit to Me."—*Imit.* III. 42.

Here is another short direction, as if given by Christ, urging us to an entire life of usefulness and zeal for saving souls:—

"Do with thy might what thou doest; labour in My vineyard, I will be thy reward."—*Imit.* III. 47.

Recognising a great principle in our nature, that we cannot continue long at the same kind of work without feeling weariness, and that in a change of occupation we shall find refreshment, he points out to us how advantageous it is to go from devotional employments to works of charity, and wait for a return of spiritual fervour:—

"Thou canst not employ thyself unceasingly in spiritual studies and divine contemplation. Then it is expedient for

thee to flee to humble and outward works, and to refresh thyself with good actions, to await with a firm confidence My coming and heavenly visitation."—*Imit.* III. 51.

In another part, after alluding to the unrest and discomfort of the wicked in hell, he adds—

"Yet here [in this life] we have some intermission of our labours, and enjoy the comfort of our friends."—*Imit.* I. 24.

That he would have us to hold intercourse with others we see in many ways, and here, in gathering instruction or taking warning from what we notice in others. We may even gather from the words in the latter passages quoted, that he was, to use a homely phrase, fond of chatting with his neighbours :—

"Be careful also to avoid with great diligence those things in thyself which do commonly displease thee in others.

"Gather some profit to thy soul wheresoever thou art ; so that if thou seest or hearest of any good examples, thou stir up thyself to the imitation thereof."—*Imit.* I. 25.

"Why do we so willingly talk one with another, when notwithstanding we seldom cease our converse before we have hurt our conscience ? The cause why we so willingly talk is, for that by discoursing one with another, we seek to receive comfort one of another, and desire to ease our minds, wearied with many thoughts. And we very willingly talk and think of those things which we most love and desire ; or of those things which we feel to be against us."

And again :—

"If it be lawful for thee to speak, speak those things that may edify. Evil habit and neglect of our growth in grace do give too much liberty to inconsiderate speech. Yet discourse of spiritual things doth further our spiritual growth, especially when persons of one mind and spirit associate together in God."—*Imit.* I. 10.

Notice in what a beautiful light he sets the works

of true charity, as the operation of divine grace, and contrasts them with the cold calculating self-seeking of the natural man :—

“ Nature striveth for her own advantage, and considereth what profit she may reap by another. Grace considereth not what is profitable and convenient unto herself, but rather what may be *the good of many*.

“ Nature is covetous, doth more willingly receive than give, and loveth to have things private and her own. Grace is *kind of heart, and ready to share with others*, shunneth private interest, is content with a little, judgeth that it is more blessed to *give* than to receive.”—*Imit.* III. 54.

By meekness and gentleness towards all, and condescending to men of low estate, how admirably are we taught to follow the example of Christ our Saviour in these words !—

“ Grace *favoureth the poor* rather than the rich, *sympathiseth* more with the innocent than with the powerful ; *rejoiceth with the true man*, not with the deceitful. She is ever exhorting good men to strive for the best gifts ; and by all virtue to become *like to the Son of God*.”—*Imit.* III. 54.

His interceding for others at the Throne of Grace is a sign that he was not the man absolutely isolated from his kind, and had no thought or concern for the salvation of his fellow-creatures ; even those estranged from him come in for a share of his petitions : for, after praying for those near and dear to him, and all the devout, he continues :—

“ I offer up also unto Thee my prayers and intercessions for those especially who have in anything wronged, grieved, or slandered me, or have done me any damage or displeasure. I pray for all those also whom I have at any time vexed, troubled,

grieved, and scandalised by words or deeds, knowingly or in ignorance ; that it may please Thee to forgive us all our sins and offences, one against another.

" Take from our hearts, O Lord, all suspiciousness, indignation, wrath, and contention, and whatsoever may hurt charity and lessen brotherly love. Have mercy, O Lord, have mercy on those who crave Thy mercy, give grace to them that stand in need hereof, and make us such as that we may be counted worthy to enjoy Thy grace, and go forward to life eternal. Amen."—*Imit.* IV. 9.

Who, then, can read this beautiful prayer, and imagine that the author of it had, by some monstrous perversion of divine truth, crushed out of his heart all concern for the rest of his fellow-creatures, and took no interest in their welfare, not even in those near him ; or that he had separated himself entirely from them, and was so absorbed in his own salvation, that he had not a thought for them, or, that such was the purport of his teaching !

Though the author of the 'De Imitatione' might not be so directly concerned with domestic ties or worldly occupations as many persons are, yet the following passage sufficiently shows that the social relations and interests of life were not excluded from his system, else why did he advise his readers to be in charity with those who from some cause were at variance with us, in coming to the Holy Communion ?—

" Cheerfully forgive others whatever offences they have done against thee. And if thou hast offended any, humbly crave pardon, and God will readily forgive thee."—*Imit.* IV. 10.

Even in the ministration of the sacred elements we perceive how a due consideration is to be had for others, and for the convenience of those who attend



the sacred ordinance, so that the good of others should be thought of rather than our own conceits :—

“ Be not too slow nor yet hurried in celebrating, but keep the accustomed manner of those with whom thou livest. Thou oughtest not to be tedious and troublesome to others, but to observe the received custom, according to the appointment of our fathers ; and rather yield thyself up to the edification of others than to thine own devotion or feelings.”—*Imit.* iv. 10.

Thus in all these several passages which we have adduced, we catch glimpses all through the four books of the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ from one end to the other, of the author’s thoughtful regard and tender solicitude for the welfare of his fellow-kind, with many touches of the sympathies and longings of our common being, which show that he was not so wholly engrossed with the thoughts of his own advancement in holiness as to be insensible to the trials, sorrows, necessities, and conveniences of others. We cannot say that in his great endeavour to elevate and ennoble the soul of man, he would have him to be so exclusively taken up with his own spiritual interests as to have no thought or care for those of his fellow-creatures ; on the contrary, he is to do good to them in many ways, and his love to man to shine forth continually. With therefore the passages before us that we have quoted, we cannot but reverse the judgment of the adverse criticism, and repel the crushing accusations brought against the ‘*De Imitatione*.’

But again, what shall we say to the accusations made against the ‘*De Imitatione*,’ “that the spirit of utter sadness pervades it ;” that, “in its utter repudia-

tion of every natural joy the 'De Imitatione' breathes a sense of utter despair; there is no accent of human tenderness, no gleam of holy friendship"? Well, we have already in some measure amply disproved the assertions, and yet there is here a fresh ingredient thrown into the bitter cup, which we must notice. There is a degree of truth in it, which does not give the whole truth, or rather misrepresents it. There are few Christians but have their dark and cloudy days; some have seasons when utter despair seems to seize upon them—a sad depression and fearfulness of spirit; and, after a while, like the storms of winter, these feelings pass away, and their hearts are again cheered with the blessings of God as if the sun shone out upon them and the hope of better things had come. We do not, however, because of these passing moments of despondency, condemn these persons as given over to utter despair. It would be wrong—incorrect. And so also is it to say the like of the 'De Imitatione,' because of a few passages only which breathe a sense of terrible dejection of soul. It does not represent the accurate truth respecting the book, because it keeps back the brighter and more hopeful passages, and indicates the presence of a perpetual dreariness and hopelessness, which is far from the general character of the book. We might as well make the same charge against the book of Psalms, because here and there we have utterances of deepest woe, though we know that a wonderful change of feelings comes round, so that it is ever and anon ringing out songs of joy and gratitude.

It is difficult, indeed, to find in the 'De Imitatione' passages indicating such utter despair; whilst, on the other hand, we have many indications of the happy moments spent in retirement, and signs within the man of God of a deep well of joy, whose waters were ever springing up and refreshing his soul, else how can we account for these sayings?—

"Have a good conscience and thou shalt ever have joy."

"He enjoyeth great tranquillity of heart, that careth neither for the praise nor dispraise of men."—*Imit.* II. 6.

"The fondness of vicious pleasures overcometh the mind of him who is given to the world; and he esteemeth it a delight to be under thorns, because he hath neither seen nor tasted the sweetness of God and the inward pleasures of virtue."—*Imit.* III. 20.

"When Thou (O God) art present, all things do yield delight; but when Thou art absent, everything becometh irksome. Thou givest quietness of heart and much peace and pleasant joy. Thou makest us take delight in all things, and in all to praise Thee."—*Imit.* III. 34.

The causes of man's joy in life are multiform; and though they do not proceed in every case from domestic life, natural pursuits and objects, or worldly gain and pleasures, it would be an egregious mistake to imagine that there was no other source of joy than these; for there is a joy of no common kind, exceedingly precious, and which the righteous man possesses, that is more durable, and less evanescent than that of the world. And since the 'De Imitatione' chiefly mentions this true joy, above all other joys, though not to the entire exclusion of the innocent enjoyments of life—does not the charge brought against the book, in respect to its sense of utter sadness and despair, appear to be a

gross exaggeration, and even something more,—a misrepresentation of its general character?

Once more, and but briefly, we are told that the 'De Imitatione' bids us "abase our reason," "annihilate the lower part of our nature." Well, if by the latter expression is meant, "Keep the lower part of our nature in *subjection*," it is true, and we do not see the evil of it, but great good; and it is moreover according to the precepts of Holy Writ. But if the word "annihilate" is meant, we do not know how the accusation can be proved; and we cannot but think that in the criticism a wrong word has been used.

And as to the former expression, we admit that the 'De Imitatione' would ever have us to bow our reason before the revelations of Divine truth, to cease from an inordinate desire of knowledge, and to have a humble opinion of our attainments and capabilities; but we plead nevertheless that the matter is put in a very proper light, especially when it is said:—

"A humble knowledge of thyself is a surer way to God than a deep search after learning. Yet learning is not to be blamed, nor the mere knowledge of anything whatsoever, for that is good in itself and ordained by God; but a good conscience and a virtuous life are always to be preferred before it."  
—*Imit.* I. 3.

"Human reason is feeble, and may be deceived, but true faith cannot be deceived. All reason and natural search ought to follow faith, not to go before it, nor to break in upon it."  
—*Imit.* IV. 18.

(4.) Our remaining argument, to show how uncalled for these severe criticisms are, arises from the consideration as to what is the general effect of the book on those who are influenced by it? What is the practical

result of its teaching? How are men affected by it? They are certainly induced to lead more devout and holy lives, to seek more constant retirement from the world, for more frequent and intimate communion with God, to be more watchful, earnest, and persevering, to humble themselves, to keep a firmer curb on their carnal appetites, and to restrain their desires after worldly goods and earthly delights; but surely this does not make them more selfish and inconsiderate towards others—less loving, less helpful, less compassionate, less hopeful, less happy, but the contrary. They have a peace and joy that the world knows not of, and as it is said in the beautiful words of our Liturgy, “which the world can neither give nor take away;” they have something to look forward to, and to fall back upon, when all things else fail them, and for which they are content to live as pilgrims and strangers on the earth; they become more tender and kind towards those about them, assisting, directing, cheering, and comforting them as best they can. We have but to call to mind the blessed change in the life of Monsieur de Renty, to which some allusion was made in the earlier part of this volume, and what the lives of others similarly influenced by such teaching as the ‘*De Imitatione*’ inculcates, and we shall feel persuaded how much better men they are in themselves, better both for themselves and for the world around them; those who come within their reach and influence are the better for it, in some way, for they live not unto themselves alone. Being earnest about their own salvation, they have become earnest about the salvation of others.



How clearly is this seen in the lives of such men as Francis de Sales, Francis Xavier, Schwartz, Bishop Gray of Capetown, Bishop Patteson, and Bishop Milman of Calcutta,—men who were modelled after the teaching of the ‘*De Imitatione*.’<sup>1</sup>

Those who have taken upon themselves to criticise this book so harshly seem to have been under an impression that it was written by a monk who never or scarcely ever came out of his cell, never or scarcely ever spoke to any one, never or scarcely ever had any happiness in life, or social intercourse with others, never or scarcely ever had any one to love or take an interest in, to help, care for, and be kind to, and that his heart had become dried up, so as to be without natural affections. Yet not only does the internal evidence of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ contradict this, but the life of Thomas à Kempis and his associates—the Brothers of the Common Life—shows that this was not the case. For whether Thomas wrote the book of the ‘*De Imitatione*’ or not, it is certain, and not disputed, that he and his associates knew the work well, and tried to fashion their lives by it; and there is sufficient known respecting them to show that, though they lived in a monastery, they were of another sort to those who are reputed to have lived as idle and selfish; for they lived the most self-denying and labori-

<sup>1</sup> The able writer whose words we have lately quoted, says—“The two desires, for one’s own and others’ immortality, are in fact bound up with each other in one affection, and make but one affection between them. This affection is essentially not a lonely one; no human being ever desired a future life for himself alone; he wants it for all for whom he entertains an affection here, all the good he has known, or whom he has only heard of.”—Mozley’s *Univ. Ser.*, p. 69.



ons lives; not only supporting themselves by the work of their hands, but giving much of their time to teaching the young, to visiting the sick, to relieving the needy, and to preaching the gospel. They held social intercourse with those about them, especially with Christ's blessed ones, however poor or lowly they were. The memory of their many works and labours of love has not altogether yet died away in the places where they lived. The fervour and devotion of their saintly lives is not yet forgotten, but is like to fragrant incense which leaves behind it a sweet perfume.<sup>1</sup> These men that were much with God had power with men. The light of their lives which shone before men, was for the glory of God, and had come from God. The love which they displayed for the salvation of souls had been kindled at the fountain of

<sup>1</sup> The members of this community were called by several names, chiefly that of "the Brothers of Common Life" (*Gemeinesleben*), or "the good Brothers and Sisters." The Brethren *Gemeinesleben* had no less than forty-five houses in A.D. 1430, and in 1460 more than thrice the number. Besides the Monastery of Mount St. Agnes, distant about three miles from Zwolle, there were flourishing houses of the brotherhood in the town of Zwolle, and its neighbouring town of Kampen. In the latter town, two of the large gateways into it are named after the "Brothers," and still keep up the memory of their past deeds. The one is called the "Cellebroeders-Poort," and the other the "Broeders-Poort," or "Brothers' Gate." They are both of them very large and handsome structures. A traveller, two or three years ago, on visiting the place, was much puzzled about the origin of their names, and upon inquiry from a somewhat intelligent inhabitant about them, he gathered from him the following information: "Formerly," said he, "the *Cellebroeders* were monks who had everything in common, but by what mysterious means their name of 'Fratres Communis Vitæ' has been abbreviated to '*Cellebroeders*' I cannot pretend to say. But their convent, which was called by the same name, was formerly in the street leading to *Cellebroeders Poort*, while that of the monks under age was in the street bordering on the *Broeders-Poort*. It is therefore not curious that they should bequeath their names to both monuments."

The traveller having testified great astonishment that, notwithstanding the care taken at the Reformation to stifle the remembrance of the old religion,

all love ; and the grace they needed they continually sought from above. Their many deeds of charity are not recorded ; they did not chronicle them ; they did what they could from love to God and man ; happy in the work, and looking for no recompence, they cared not to have their works published ; but they were nevertheless registered in heaven, and will be remembered by Christ, Who marked all they did. The rules by which they lived will sufficiently, however, attest their course of life ; they constantly had them before their eyes, reading them according to custom once or twice a week, so that they might ever be trying to carry them out into daily action.

The first of these rules was, "To observe the fundamental law of *Love* : first towards God, then towards our neighbour, according to its just extent ; and to imitate the example of the Mother-Church of Jeru-

the town monuments should still retain the name of the communist monks, his informant replied, "You need not be surprised at this, because the Cellobroeders have always been held in great veneration, and their name is respected by every one."

We may further add, in the words of the same writer, that "the veneration in which they are held is easily explained by the saintly life which the members of this association led, who, by their untiring perseverance, rendered great service to both science and literature. During the period when all religious sects lived in selfish plenty, and possessed more luxury than they needed, both in their privileges and princely domains, or by exercising the right of begging, which was only a disguised imposition, these Cellobroeders lived by the work of their hands ; for they copied and recopied the works of the holy fathers, as well as those of moralists and ascetics. They compared the manuscripts, which were scattered over the town, with the originals, rectified the errors of inexperienced copyists, and worked so as to extend science and truth in every department. The money they obtained for these manuscripts was deposited in the general bank, and was employed to maintain the clerks ; and such was the honesty of these scholars, that not one of them ever kept back anything for himself, but gave up all for the good of the community. But because they would not beg, they made the mendicant Orders their enemies."—Hallam, *Introd. Lit. Europe*, i. 110 ; Havard, *Dead Cities of the Zeyder-Zee*, pp. 294, 295.

salem, in unanimity of heart, and in communicativeness of charity."

The fifth rule should be especially noticed :—

"To take charge of the sick and infirm, so far as we are capable ; and to do them all the service, both bodily and spiritually, that is in our power."

And so also should the eighth :—

"To do all that may be done for the good and interest of the community ; and to be content with the distribution of the common fund, though not altogether so favourable as might be expected."

There is a small engraving of Thomas à Kempis in an old book which seems to point to this kind of life, and explains and illustrates the very secret of it, and the principle we have been contending for. The devout man is represented at the altar gazing upwards, with a countenance full of ecstatic joy, beaming with delight at the figure of Jesus, Who appears to be regarding him from amid clouds of glory ; a ray of light comes from the Saviour to the heart of Thomas, which is represented on the breast of Thomas as set on fire with it, and at the same time a ray of light is seen coming *from* the heart of Thomas, and lighting upon the world, which in turn is set on fire by it. And so it is, that the power and the love which is to touch other men's hearts and convert them, must be first obtained from God our Saviour. These graces are not in man naturally, and can only be obtained by personal communion with Christ, by coming into frequent contact with Him—having our own cold selfish hearts afresh inflamed, and grace drawn ever anew from the

Divine fountain. It is by this means that a man gets true help and peace and blessing for himself and for others; and it is on this principle that the '*De Imitatione*' so fully teaches us to seek God first, and conform ourselves to His will wholly in heart and life.

A much sounder judgment, in the opinion of many, has been given by Dr. Chalmers relative to the points under discussion, than is to be found in the criticisms we have had to encounter; and therefore we shall conclude with an extract from his *Essay on the Book of the Imitation*. He says:—

"The severities of Christian practice, which are here urged upon the reader, are in no way allied with the penances and the self-inflictions of a monastic ritual, but are the essentials of spiritual discipline in all ages, and must be undergone by every man who is transformed by the Holy Ghost from one of the children of this world to one of the children of light. The utter renunciation of self—the surrender of all vanity—the patient endurance of evils and wrongs—the crucifixion of natural and worldly desires—the absorption of all our interests and passions in the enjoyment of God—and the subordination of all we do, and of all we feel, to His glory,—these form the leading virtues of our pilgrimage, and in the very proportion of their rarity, and their painfulness, are they the more effectual tests of our regeneration. And one of the main uses of this book is, that while it enforces these spiritual graces in all their extent, it lays open the spiritual enjoyment that springs from the cultivation of them—revealing the hidden charm which lies in godliness, and demonstrating the sure though secret alliance which obtains between the peace of heaven in the soul, and patience under all the adversities of the path which leads to it. It exposes alike the sufferings and the delights which attach to a life of sacredness: and its wholesome tendency is to reconcile the aspirant after eternal life, to the whole burthen of that cross on earth which he must learn to bear with submission and cheerfulness, until he exchanges it in heaven for a crown of

glory. Such a work may be of service in these days of soft and silken professorship,—to arouse those who are at ease in Zion; to remind them of the terms of the Christian discipleship, as involving a life of conflict, and watchfulness, and much labour; to make them jealous of themselves, and jealous of that evil nature, the power of which must be resisted, but from the besetting presence of which we shall not be conclusively delivered, until death shall rid us of a framework, the moral virus of which may be kept in check while we live, but cannot be eradicated by any process short of dissolution."

With such a calm and thoughtful review of the 'De Imitatione' we are content to leave the question, feeling sure that it will serve as an antidote against those detractions which have been urged against it, and help to restore it to a better and truer estimate in the minds of those who have for a while doubted its real worth and character, so that they may again still use the book to their great advantage, with the fervent love which it so richly deserves.

## APPENDIX.

### No. I.

#### A LIST OF THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE 'DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI' FOUND IN ENGLAND.

##### I. In the BRITISH MUSEUM. Among the *Harleian MSS.* No. 3216.

Dated 1464. Without any name attached to it. After the table of chapters this inscription is found :—

"Primi libri presentis operis. De perfecta Animæ Philosophia. Primum capitulum de Imitatione Christi, et contemptu omnis vanitatum mundi feliciter incipit."

It contains all the four books ; but there are two other works in the same codex. It is very clearly and distinctly written on parchment. At the beginning there is a beautifully illuminated figure of Christ rising from the tomb, with a banner having the cross upon it ; and there are five keepers around the tomb asleep. At the commencement of the fourth book there is another illuminated picture, where a priest is represented administering the Sacrament to the communicants. All the initial letters of the several chapters are in gold and blue ; the headings of the chapters are sometimes in gold letters and sometimes in blue. At the end of the fourth book, in the same hand, these words occur :—" Laus honor et gloria Deo nostro. In secula seculorum, Amen :—Completum xxi December 1464."



## II. In the *Harleian Collection*. No. 3223.

Dated 1478. After the table of the first chapter this inscription is found :—

"Incipit libellus devotus et utilis, compositus a D. Johanne Gersem, Cancellario parisiensi. De Imitatione," etc.

It contains all the four books, and there is no other work along with it. It is written in fine bold characters on parchment. At the beginning of the first book there is a small illuminated figure of Christ bearing His cross. The headings of the chapters are all in red letters. At the end of the fourth book, in the same handwriting, these words occur :—"Deo Gratias. Explicit liber quartus et ultimus de Sacramento altaris. Anno Domini Jesu Christi. 1478. Exfloret."

The present order of the books is observed in both this and the former manuscript.

## III. In the *Burney Collection*. No. 314.

Without date. At the beginning of the book this inscription is found :—

"Incipit libellus Devotus et utilis (*sic*) compositus A Domine Johanne Geersem (*sic*) Cancellario Parisiensi."

It contains all the four books in the order in which they are now usually found, and there is no other work in the volume. It is admirably and legibly written on paper. There are no illuminated capital letters ; but the headings of the chapters are all in red letters. At the end of the volume there are simply these words written :—"Deo Gratias."

## IV. In the *Royal Collection*. No. 8, C. vii.

Without date and without name. It only contains the first book of the 'De Imitatione,' having also the 25th chapter incomplete. It is very legibly written on parchment. The headings of the chapters are in red letters, and it begins in the middle of a line with 'De Imitatione,' etc. There are several other works in the same codex. See further account of this on p. 84.

V. From the *Additional Manuscripts*. No. 11,437.

Without date. It commences simply with 'Cancellarius Parusiensis' (*sic*). There are only the first two books, and there are many other works in the same volume. It is written on paper, and is difficult to read, because of the contractions and peculiar character of the writing.

VI. In the *Royal Collection*. No. 7, B. viii.

Without date and without name. It contains the first three books, and commences thus:—"Incipit liber interne consolationis qui vocatur *Musica Ecclesiastica*: et dividitur in tres partes principales," etc. It is written on parchment in large bold letters, very clear and distinct, in folio, and without having any other work in the volume. The frontispiece is a full-sized illuminated picture of the Pope with his triple crown, playing on some musical instrument very like an organ; a cardinal is blowing with a pair of bellows behind the instrument; and at the back of the Pope are two bishops in their chasubles, mitres, and pastoral staffs, fully robed, singing from a book. The capital letters all through the book are slightly illuminated. In the colophon we have these words, "Explicit tertia et ultima pars libri interne consolationis qui vocatur musica ecclesiastica."<sup>1</sup>

VII. In the *BODLEIAN LIBRARY*, OXFORD, No. 1957. 4.

"Liber de *Musica Ecclesiastica*, ita scilicet inscribitur sed sensu allegorico, agit enim totus de rebus ad pietatem spectantibus. Cap. i. est de Imitatione Christi."

VIII. *BODLEIAN LIBRARY*, OXFORD. No. 3481. 93.

"*Musica Ecclesiastica* alias de Imitatione Christi, tribus partibus, Scriptus erat liber est A.D. 1469. And in octavo, Edwardi IV. Regis Angliæ, etc., per Tho. Kempis."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This ms., though bearing the title *Musica Ecclesiastica*, has not been noticed before in this work. Other mss. with the same title have been found, and it seems to be confined to England.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 92 and 93 for a further account respecting both these mss.

IX. In the BODLEIAN LIBRARY, OXFORD.

In the *Catalogue of Archbishop Laud's Collection*, No. 825 or 215, there is a manuscript described after this manner:—*De interna consolatione, tractatus imperfectus.*

X. Another manuscript in the same Collection, No. 771 or 167, has this inscription at the bottom of the first page, after the headings of the chapters contained in the first book:—*"Joannes de Kempis, i.e. Bonaventuræ formulæ."* It contains all the four books of the '*De Imitatione Christi.*' It is clearly and beautifully written on paper. The volume contains several other works.<sup>1</sup>

XI. In MAGDALEN COLL. LIB., OXFORD. No. 2234. 93.

*"De Musica Ecclesiastica liber spiritualis. Est autem libellus aureus Thomæ à Kempis de Imitatione Christi, et continet tres partes."* Dated 1438.<sup>2</sup>

XII. In the CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY there is another manuscript of the '*De Imitatione,*' entitled *Musica Ecclesiastica.*<sup>3</sup>

XIII. Barnard states that in EMMANUEL COLL., CAMBRIDGE, there is a ms. on parchment. It is thus described:—

*"B. Augustini Soliloquia, cum Thomæ à Kempis Musica Ecclesiastica."*

XIV. In the LAMBETH PALACE LIBRARY, No. 536, there is a fine ms. copy of the '*De Imitatione Christi,*' also called *Musica Ecclesiastica*, which contains the first three books. It is on parchment, without name or date; very boldly and legibly written, with the capital letters in blue and red. It ends thus:—"Explicit libri interne consolationis in tertis primis libri musica ecclesiastica." There are eight other works in the same codex. 4to.

<sup>1</sup> Mention is made of this ms. in p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 92 and 93 also.

<sup>3</sup> See the account of this ms., p. 94.

XV. In the Catalogue of the late SIR THOMAS PHILLIPPS there is a MS. in Greek referred to, which is thus described:—"No. 5227. Thomas à Kempis, De Imitatione Christi. Græci fol. Charta (Guildford MSS.)," and appears to be about the end of the sixteenth or beginning of the seventeenth century.

XVI. Barnard in his Catalogue of Anglican MSS., No. 1447, speaks of a manuscript in the SCHOOL AT COVENTRY in which the title-page and the author's name are not mentioned. It is divided into three parts, which are thus called:—

1. Musica Ecclesiastica.
2. Admonitiones ad interna trahentes.
3. De interna Consolatione.

## No. II.

### *LATIN EDITIONS OF THE 'DE IMITATIONE CHRISTI' TO THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY TO BE FOUND IN ENGLAND.*

[The letters within brackets represent the places where copies are to be found; B. M. standing for British Museum, and B. O. for Bodleian Library, Oxford.]

*Without a date.* The letters are rudely formed, and many of the words are contracted, and it has at first sight rather the appearance of a manuscript: it evidently marks the transition point of time from manuscript to printing; and is some years prior to any book printed in England.

The inscription is "Incipiunt ammonitiones ad spirituales vitam utiles. De Imitatione," etc. There is only the first book, and there are several other works in the same volume; no place and no printer's name mentioned.—(B. M.)

*About A.D. 1468.* Augsburg. Folio. The authorship is attributed to Thomas à Kempis. This is a fine edition, in noble Gothic type, very readable. M. de Grégory calls

it the "Editio princeps." For further particulars about this Edition see pages 342 and 343.—(B. M. <sup>1</sup>)

1482. Metens. 4to. In fine Gothic letters, but without author's name.

The inscription at the beginning of the book is "Incipiunt Ammoniciones ad spiritualem vitam utiles. Ca. primum De Imitatione," etc.

The colophon is "Impresse in civitate Metensi, per fratrem Johannem Colini, Ordinis fratrum Carmelitarum. Et Gerhardum de nova civitate. Anno Domini Mille. cccclxxxii."—(B. M.)

1483. Venetiis. 4to.

The inscription is "Incipit liber primus Joannis Gerson Cancellarii Parisiensis de Imitatione Christi."—(B. M.)

1483. Without any place named, but attributed to Gerson.—(B. O.)

1483. Venetiis. 4to.—(B. M.)

1485. Bologna. In fine Gothic letters.

The inscription is like the one above for 1483.

The colophon is "Finit m.cccclxxxv per Dionysius et Peregrinum ejus sotium Bononienses. Deo Gratias, Amen."—(B. M.)

1485. There is another edition of this date, without the name of place, in 4to, attributed to Thomas à Kempis.—(B. O.)

1485. And a third of this date. 4to. Venetiis.—(B. M., B. O.)

1486. Venetiis. 8vo.—(B. M., B. O.)

1487. Fine copy in Gothic characters, without name of place or author.

Begins thus, "Tractatus aureus et per utilis de perfecta Ymitatione Cristi et vero mundi contempta." There is Gerson's work on "Meditation" following it. The colophon is "Finiunt feliciter. Anno Domini m.cccclxxxvii."—(B. M.)

1487. Antverpiæ. Attributed to Gerson.—(B. O.)

1487. Argentine, in 4to. Attributed to Thomas à Kempis.—(B. M., B. O.)

<sup>1</sup> There are two copies of this edition in the British Museum in excellent preservation.

1487. Argentina. Attributed to John Gerson.—(B. O.)

1487. Zeiner. 16mo.—(B. M.)

One without date or name of place. A fine copy in Gothic letters.

The inscription is "Incipit liber primus Johannis Gerson Cancellarii parisiensis, De Imitatione," etc.

The colophon is "Impressus per me Johannem de Westfalia"—(B. M. and Magdalen Coll., Ox.)

Another edition without date. Lugduni. Attributed to Thomas à Kempis.—(B. O.)

A third edition without date. Auguste Vind. Attributed to Thomas à Kempis.—(B. O.)

1488. Auguste. 4to.—(B. M., B. O.)

1488. Milano.—(B. O.)

1488. Rosso du Vercelle. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1489. Venetia. 4to.—(B. M.)

1489. Lugduni. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1489. Argentine. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1489. Augustina. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1489. Milano. 4to.—(B. M.)

1492. Paris. 8vo.—(B. M., B. O.)

1492. Without place, in black letter, in the late Sir Thomas Phillip's Library.

1493. Luneborch. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1494. Nuremberg. Opera et libri vitæ Thomæ à Kempis, containing the 'De Imitatione.' Fol. Dauhhausen.—(B. M.)

1496. Parisii. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1501. Venetiis. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1517. Parisii. 8vo. On the title-page is the cipher IR, probably that of King Henry VIII.—(B. M.)

1518. Antverpie. 16mo.—(B. M.)

1523. "Opera Thomæ à Campis cognomento Malleoli sol ex off. Jodoci Badii Ascensii."—(Magdalen College, Oxford.)

1536. "Opuscula Venerabilis Thomæ de Kempis canonici Regularis, Venetiis." 16mo.—(B. M.)

1550. Antverpie. "Authore D. Thoma de Kempis." On the first page, just before "Qui sequitur Me," these words



occur, "Dulcissimi ac Religiosissimi F. Thomas de Kempis De Imitatione Christi, Libri Quatuor plures Divini, qui falso D. Joanni Gersoni Cancellario Parisiensi vulgo ascripti sunt."—(Lambeth Palace Library.)

1555. Lugduni.—(B. O.)

1567. Lugduni.—(B. M.)

1570. Lovanii. 12mo.—(B. M.)

1574. Antverpiæ. 8vo. "Opera T. à Campis, etc., containing the books of the De Imitatione."—(B. M. and Lambeth Palace Library.)

1575. Coloniae, Apud Ludovicum Alextorium. Authore D. Thoma de Kempis.—(Sion College, London.)

1579. Lugduni. 16mo.—(B. M.)

1587. Coloniae. "Authore D. Thoma de Kempis." With the same words before "Qui Sequitur" as in ed. 1550.—(Lambeth Palace Library.)

### NO. III.

#### AN ACCOUNT OF THE VARIOUS ANCIENT EDITIONS OF THE 'DE IMITATIONE' PRINTED IN ENGLISH

TO A.D. 1700.

Date 1502. Atkynson. Princess Marguerite.

"A full devoute and gostely treatyse of ye Imytacion and Folowyngye ye blessed Lyfe of our most mercifull Saviour Crist. Compyled in Laten by the right worshypfull doctor master John Gerson: and translate into Englissh the yere of our lorde M.D.II., by Mayster Wylliam Atkynson, Doctor of Divynyte; at ye speciall request and commandement of ye full excellent pryncesse Margarete, Moder to our Soverayne Lorde Kynge Henry the VII., and countesse of Rychemount and Derby.<sup>1</sup> MCCCC II."

This relates only to the first three books of the 'De Imitatione.' The fourth was translated by Margarete herself, "out of Frenche into Englissh in fourme and maner ensuyinge, the

<sup>1</sup> The Foundress also of St. John's and Christ's Colleges, Cambridge.

yere of Lorde our God M.D.IV. Inprynted at London in Flete Strete at the signe of the Sonne by Wyukyn de Worde in 4<sup>o</sup>. Goth."

This edition is very rare. The first three books take up 96 leaves, and the fourth book 18.

There appear to have been two editions printed by Wyukyn de Worde; one with the date 1502, and one without a date. See Ames, *Typographical Antiquities* (Dibdin), I. 112, 113.—(B. M.)<sup>1</sup>

Dates, 1503	} Richard Pynson.
1504	
1517	

The above translation seems to have been also "Emprynted in London by Richarde Pynson in Flete Strete at the signe of the George, in 4<sup>o</sup>. Goth." The first three books have the signature A. Q. attached, 1503; and the fourth book is on 18 pages, 1504.—(B. M., B. O.)

In 1517 another edition was printed by R. Pynson, London, in 4to. Books 1-3 end on the reverse leaf after Q ii., "The forthe boke" on the thurd leaf after sign C iii.

Without date. Robert Redman, who died in the year 1540.

Entitled "The Folowing of Christe, with the Golden Epistel of Saynt Bernard," by Robert Redman. London, 16mo, folios clxxv.

The introduction begins at the back of the title thus:—

"Whyche boke as some men asserme was fyrst made and compyled in latyn by the famous Clerke, Mayster John Gerson, and thoughte iii of the fyrst bokes have been before this tyme right well and devoutly translated in to Englysshe by a famous Clerke called Mayster Wylliam Atkynson, which was a doctour of Divinite, yet for as moche as the sayd translatour for some cause hym moving in divers places lyfte out moche parte of some of the Chapytres, and sometymes varied fro the letter—therefore the sayd bokes be eltsones translatyd in such maner as hereafter followeth."

<sup>1</sup> There are two copies in the British Museum of Worde's 'De Imitatione Christi.' One of them is imperfect, wanting the title page and the following leaf. The other, which is in the Grenville collection, is entire, and in beautiful preservation.

500 *The Authorship of the De Imitatione Christi.*

Without date. Godfray.

A fine copy in black letter: having in the same book "the Revelations of Saynt Birgette, with an Epistell of Saynt Bernarde."

"Printed at London, at Temple Barre, by Thomas Godfray. Cum privilegio a rege indulto."—(B. M., B. O.)

Without date. John Redman.<sup>1</sup>

"The Imitation of Christ, by Thomas à Kempis. Southwarke, London, in 16°."

Many of the following editions are cited by Lowndes, page 1260:—

An edition without date, by Robert Wyer, in 24mo. But about 1536.

It contains also "the fourth boke newly exaymned, corrected, and imprinted."

Date 1556. Translated into English by Richard Whitford. London, by J. Cawood, in 16mo.

And again by the same in 1585 in 8vo, attributing the work to Gerson.—(Bibl. Bodl., p. 492.)

1567. Hake.

"The Imitation or following of Christ, and the contemning of worldly vanities, at the first written by Thomas Kempise, a Dutchman; amended and polished by Sebastian Castalio, an Italian; and Englished by Edw. H. (Edward Hake, of Gray's Inn), London, 1567, in 8vo, by H. Denham."

Dedicated to Thomas Duke of Norfolk. "Whereunto, as a spring out of the same root, we have adjoined a short pretie Treatise, touching the perpetuall rejoyce of the godlie even in this life."

1568. London, in 16mo.—(B. M., B. O.)

One without date. London, in 8vo.—(B. M.)

1584. Rogers.

"The Imitation of Christ, three books made 170 years since

<sup>1</sup> John Redman, who probably succeeded Robert, appears to have printed only two other books: one in 1540, and the other in 1542.

by Thomas de Kempis, and for the worthines thereof oft since translated into sundrie languages, now newly translated, and with most ample textes and sentences of Holy Scripture illustrated. London, 1584."

1587. The same.—(B. M.)

1589. The same, in 16mo.

1592. The fourth book of the 'De Imitatione' was printed.

1628. The same.

1592. The first three books in 24mo.

Other editions by Rogers appeared in 1596, in 12mo (B. M.); 1602, in 12mo (B. M. and B. O.); 1605, in 18mo; 1617 (B. M.); 1628, in 12mo; 1629, in 12mo; 1636, in 12mo (B. M.); 1640, printed for the Company of Stationers (Sion College, London).

1585.

"The folowing of Christ, translated out of Latin into English, newly corrected and amended. Whereunto also is added the golden Epistle of Sainet Bernarde. And now lastelie the rules of a Christian lyfe, made by John Picus, the elder Earle of Mirandula.

Anno 1585. Cum privilegis." In 12mo, pp. 158.—(B. O.,

1613. No place. The same, by B. F.—(B. O.)

1615. The same, with this inscription:—

"The folowing of Christ divided in foure bookes. Written in Latin by the learned and devout man Thomas à Kempis, Canon Regular of the Order of St. Augustine. Whereunto, etc., as above. Translated into English by B. F. Printed, with licence, 1615."

1624. Carré.

The Imitation of Christ, III. Books, Englished by Thomas Carré. Paris: 1624.

"The folowing of Christ. Written in Latine, by Thomas of Kempis, Canon Regular of the Order of St. Augustine of the Mount St. Agnes. Reviewed and in divers things corrected. By M. C., confessor to the English nuns at Paris, who also added the said Thomas his life."

In 1636 the second edition appeared, wherein T. Carré more amply proved T. à Kempis to be the undoubted author of this book. At Paris, by M. Blageart.—(E. M.)

1641. The same, in 16mo, pp. 487.

1633. Translated into English by F. B., the fourth edition. Douay, 16mo.—(B. M.)

1633. Consturier.

The Following of Christ, etc. Written in Latin by the Learned and Devout man Thomas à Kempis, Canon Regular of the Order of St. Augustine. Translated into English by F. B. By John Consturier, M.DC.XXXIII.—(B. M.)

1639. Page.

The Imitation of Christ. London, 1639, in 12mo.

Dr. Watt cites William Page in his *Bibliotheca Britannica*, "with a large epistle to the reader."

1639. The same, more correct. Oxford, in 8vo.—(B. O.)

1677. The same. London, small 8vo.—(B. M., B. O.)

1652. Worthington.

The Imitation of Christ, by Dr. Worthington.

The authority for this edition is to be found in the Gentleman's Magazine for A.D. 1772, p. 561, where it is stated that "it is to be valued for its simplicity and faithfulness."

1677. The same appeared in another edition.

1670. There is an edition with this date in the Bodleian Library

1657. Daniel.

"The Christian's Pattern, etc., written originally in Latin by Thomas à Kempis above 200 years since.

Printed by R. Daniel, and are to be sold by John Clark, at Mercers Chappel, Cheapside, 1657."—(Lambeth Library.)

1673.

"The Following of Christ in four books, by John Gersen, Abbot of Vercelles, of the Holy Order of St. Benedict. Drawn out of ten manuscripts, some written four hundred years ago, and set forth by the famous Abbot Cajétan, chronologist to Paul v., and dedicated to him, and printed at Rome, with

approbation and general acceptance, 1644. London, 1673. No printer's name.—(B. M., B. O., and Sion College, London)

1684. Redmayne.

"The Christian's Pattern, or a Divine Treatise of the Imitation of Christ. Written originally in Latin by Thomas of Kempis above two hundred years since." London. Printed by Eliz Redmayne, 1684.

1699. The same.

1701. The same.

Printed by E. Redmayne for J. Sprint at the Bell, and Thomas Ballard, at the Rising Sun in Little Britain, 1701.—(B. M.)

1686. An English translation, printed at Antwerp for T. D.—(B. M.)

1687. Watson.

The Following of Christ, etc. Holy-Rood-House, by James Watson, 1687, 12mo.—(B. M.)

1694. Milbourne.—(B. M.)

The Following of Christ paraphrased into English verse by Luke Milbourne. London, 1694.

1697. The same again republished.—(B. O.)

1695. Wellington.

"The Christian Pattern, etc., faithfully Englished. Printed in a larger character for the benefit of the aged. London. Printed for Richard Wellington, at the Lute in St. Paul's Church Yard, 1695." 8vo. — (B. M.)

1696. Stanhope.

The Christian Pattern. Translated by Dean Stanhope.

1698. The same, again published. 8vo.—(B. M.)

1699. The same. 16mo.—(B. M.)

1700. The same again.

Very many editions of Stanhope's translation were published in the eighteenth century.



We now come to the period of more *modern editions*, which were translated or edited by George Hickes, Willymott, Copping, Payne, Butler, Dibdin, Wesley, Chalmers, and others.

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